

# The reawakening of Craitbul: The revival of the Boandik language of Mount Gambier

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## Abstract

One of the challenges of modern day language revival is making sense of the old archival sources, and being able to glean from them ways of creating new terms to meet immediate needs in the community. In this paper I outline the mechanisms of lexical expansion that are available in the Boandik language of the Mount Gambier region of South Australia, with examples. This paper is a celebration of what is lexically possible in Boandik for contemporary times, and reflects on the contribution of Barry Blake in this process. I use the analogy of the re-emerging giant, Craitbul, who has lain dormant in the volcanoes of Mount Gambier for many years, but can be seen today in a permanent exhibition for tourists. So too has Blake helped bring life back to a language that has lain dormant for maybe over 100 years.

## Introduction

Mount Gambier (or Berrin) is a picturesque tourist destination located in the Limestone Coast region of South Australia (SA), 460 kms south east of Adelaide. It is the home of the Boandik or Bunganditj people, and the site of several dormant volcanoes. The crater of the largest of these volcanoes has filled with deep blue water, forming the famous “Blue Lake” (*Waawor*). In the depths of the lake sleeps a giant, named Craitbul, an important ancestral hero for the Boandik.

In 2003 Emeritus Professor Barry Blake, formerly of La Trobe University, published a book outlining the retrieved lexicon and grammar of yet another lost language of southern Australia. Entitled *The Bunganditj (Buwandik) Language of the Mount Gambier Region* it outlines details of the written archival language sources for Boandik, particularly the 1886-87 wordlists of Edward Micklethwaite Curr, the 600 words and 100 sentences of William Thomas (1862), the 1903 wordlist and sketch grammar of Robert Hamilton Mathews, five comparative wordlists collected by George Taplin (1879), and the extensive wordlist and grammatical information provided in the 1880 publication *The Boandik Tribe of the South Australian Aborigines* by Christina Smith and her son Duncan Stewart. Together these archival sources provide nearly 2,000 words from the various dialects of Boandik, plus enough sentences to piece together some of the grammar.

Since the first language revival workshop held in Mount Gambier in November 2011, the archival Boandik lexicon is now being embraced and expanded by the community to meet new and contemporary purposes, in collaboration with Blake. Old and new word-building mechanisms are being used, as in the following examples: the use of productive suffixes (eg. *yunitj* ‘swimmer’ from *yuna* ‘swim’, and *wilang-kil* ‘echidna’ from ‘spikes-with’); compounding (eg. *kuma maa* ‘white person’ from ‘green-eyes’); semantic expansion (eg. *piyatang* ‘lightning’ expanded to ‘electricity’) and word borrowing from English (eg. *tjip* for ‘ship’). With Boandik being more closely related to its eastern neighbours across the Victorian border (than to South Australian languages to the north), sharing 30% of its vocabulary, there is a further possible source of lexicon to fill the gaps. Boandik, for example, has borrowed *wuwu* meaning ‘goodbye’ from the Warnambool language, and a calque from the Tjapwurrung language of the Bendigo region (eg. *kula pup* ‘brain’ from ‘head-egg’).

## Revival begins on Country

Surprisingly, Blake's 2003 book, *The Bunganditj (Buwandik) Language of the Mount Gambier Region*, just sat on the shelves of university libraries and linguists, virtually unknown to the Boandik community in the Mount Gambier region for eight years. This was despite it conveniently summarizing all the written archival sources, outlining the phonology and overviewing the retrieved grammar, plus giving an English-Bunganditj and Bunganditj-English glossary.

A few Boandik people did make contact with Barry, including two Boandik women living in Sydney (Michelle Jacquelin-Furr and her daughter Brooke Joy), plus David Moon in Melbourne, who has since produced a CD illustrating fauna and flora with their Boandik names. But it wasn't until I visited Mount Gambier in June 2011, on behalf of the Mobile Language Team of the University of Adelaide, that the seed was sown among the local Aboriginal community, and the possibility arose of reviving the Boandik language on country in the Mount Gambier region.

I initially met with Karen Glover (from Pangula Mannamurna - a local Aboriginal health service) and Natalie Young (from Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation – an employment agency), and organized the first language revival workshop, funded by the Mobile Language Team, for November 2011. This is when Emma Hay, Nick Wilson and Des Hartman fortunately entered the scene. Des is a Boandik Elder from Murray Bridge, and Nick is a young Boandik man that lives in Mount Gambier. Emma of Burrandies has taken on the coordination of the Boandik language revival project ever since that first workshop.

Now, two years since that first June 2011 meeting, we have had six well attended Boandik language workshops run in Mount Gambier, held in November 2011, June 2012, September 2012, November 2012, March 2013 and September 2013. Burrandies has also received two Indigenous Language Support (ILS) grants from Canberra, and formed a Boandik Language Revival Working Party. Des and Nick are both on the working party, along with the other Boandik people who have a real fire in their bellies, and are passionate about bringing the Boandik language back. But the facts remains, the retrieval work of linguists such as Barry, along with their experience and knowledge of Australian Aboriginal language, greatly facilitate bringing languages back into the twenty first century. In fact my experience tells me, from working with a number of different language groups, that most language revival programs want 'their own linguist' to be involved for the long haul, providing guidance through the process of retrieving data from the archives, and assisting in language expansion and resource production.

## Background to the Boandik language

Boandik (Bunganditj) is the language once spoken from Robe in SA, to the Mouth of the Glenelg River on the Victorian border, and about 50 kms inland. It is the southernmost of a group of dialects from the southeast of SA. It is a dialect comparatively well recorded in the nineteenth century, and these records are important since the language gradually fell from use in the twentieth century.

We are fortunate to have an account of the Boandik people entitled *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language* published in 1880. It was written by the lay missionary, Christina Smith. Christina and her husband, James Smith, lived in Rivoli Bay (Beachport) from 1845 doing missionary and educational work until 1854, when the

family moved to a small farm near Mount Gambier. Christina and her son from an earlier marriage, Duncan Stewart, learnt the Boandik language and Duncan acted as an interpreter. Christina's book contains an extensive vocabulary and some grammatical information provided by Duncan.

Another valuable source for Boandik was supplied by William Thomas, an Assistant Protector for Aborigines in the late 1830s and later chief adviser to the government of Victoria on Aboriginal matters. He drew up a list of over 600 words and over 100 sentences and collected the equivalents from Ballarat, Bacchus Marsh, Melbourne, Gippsland, Mount Gambier and Wonnin (sic). The Mount Gambier material is Boandik, as you would expect, and Wonnin (Wannon) is the westernmost dialect of the Warrnambool language, in other words, the eastern neighbour of Boandik.

In general Boandik was well served by those making large scale collections of Aboriginal language material. Robert Hamilton Mathews, a surveyor, made use of the travels his work entailed to study the customs and languages of Aboriginal people in the south-eastern mainland. Mathews published dozens of grammatical sketches and some vocabularies, and one sketch and vocabulary relates to Boandik, or Bunganditj as Mathews calls it, and was provided to him by a Tommy McCallum of Casterton.

Besides these substantial sources there are some short word lists. The largest nineteenth-century source for Australian languages is a four volume work published in 1886, 1887 by Edward Micklethwaite Curr under the title *The Australian race*. Curr, the Chief Inspector of Stock in Victoria in the 1860s, collected words from Aboriginal communities he encountered in the course of his travels and then sent a questionnaire to administrators, clergymen, pastoralists and police in all parts of Australia taken over by whites at that time. Curr's book contains three word lists that represent Boandik, two from Curr himself (one from Dartmoor and another from Woodford, a homestead on the Glenelg) and one from Duncan Stewart.

The Boandik complex of dialects stretched north as far as Kingston on the coast and inland as far as Bordertown. George Taplin, a missionary who worked among the Ngarrindjeri people at Raukkan (Point McLeay) and learned their language, published a word list covering 43 Australian languages. Fortunately he included five lists from the more northerly dialects related to Boandik: Bordertown, Tarpeena, Guichen Bay (Robe), Padthaway, Penola and Tarpeena.

All in all we have nearly 2000 Boandik words, but since some words correspond to several in English we have effectively well over 2000. For example, **maruwa** can translate into English as 'take care of', 'protect' and 'preserve'.

We also have some information on case, tense and pronouns, including clitic pronouns, which were attached to the first word in the clause. Below are some examples.

(1) **Warnap-u=nga yan.**  
firewood-LOC=I go

'I am going for firewood.'

(2) *We ne-ang-aton noo-e ung-in.*

**Win-iyangath=un nu-wiyangin.**  
 beat-FUT-1SG=2SG.OBLdie-FUT=2SG  
 'I will hit you, you will die.'

(3) *Mirpah-mang-ein-wurree.*  
**Mirpa-ma=ngayn wari.**  
 SHOW-APPLIC=1SG.OBL road  
 'Show me the road.'

All of the old sources mentioned above are incorporated in Blake's 2003 book.

### Expanding the Boandik Lexicon

In the following text I list the ways the Boandik lexicon can be expanded for use in the present-day context.

#### 1. Compounding

Before the present revival program had begun the people of the southeast used a blend and a compound in naming the Aboriginal health service **Pangula Mannamurna**. **Pangula** is a blend of **pangal** 'doctor' and **ngula** 'hut, house, building', while **mannamurna** is a compound of **mana** 'take' and **marna** 'hand'. The following are some of the compounds recorded in the archival sources.

<i>Boandik</i>	<i>literal meaning</i>	<i>meaning</i>
<b>klat kurn</b>	bitter neck	unfriendly person
<b>kuma-maa</b>	green/blue-eyes	white people
<b>marlayt-mraat</b>	ripe earth	autumn
<b>marndal mraat</b>	thunder ground	earthquake
<b>ngiyuru muru</b>	treefork-bottom	koala
<b>parri maa</b>	water eye	tears
<b>wirang kini</b>	bad face	ugly

Compounding is a fertile source for forming new words. Below are a few that have been created in workshops, or independently since the revival program began:

<i>Boandik</i>	<i>literal meaning</i>	<i>meaning</i>
<b>bigbuwak ngula</b>	cow home	cattle station BJ, MJ-F
<b>pembi wurung</b>	bread long	stick bread BB
<b>pembi pirang</b>	bread cracking.sound	dry biscuit, cracker BB

<b>ngula wiwuniwa</b>	house meet-reciprocal	meeting place	BB
<b>ngula mradal</b>	house fellow-countryman	community hall	BB
<b>ngula ngarankuwitj</b>	home nimble-one	gym	BB
<b>prawul martung</b>	middle good	wellness centre	BB
<b>thanga pangal</b>	tooth doctor	dentist	FW

## 2. Derivational suffixes

Most of the derivational suffixes you would expect to find in an Australian language have been recorded in Boandik, albeit with minimal exemplification.

### a. Agent-noun forming suffix -itj

<b>yuna</b>	swim	<b>yunitj</b>	swimmer
<b>yunda</b>	push	<b>kamel-yunditj</b>	camel-driver

This suffix has obvious potential for forming agent nouns, and perhaps ‘instrument’ nouns. Here are some examples that have been developed by Blake in PowerPoint lessons he produced for present day workshops.

<b>mruwi</b>	complain	<b>mruwitj</b>	complainant, whinger
<b>prunya</b>	play	<b>prunitj</b>	player
<b>tuna</b>	dig	<b>tunitj</b>	gardener
<b>wira</b>	run	<b>wiritj</b>	runner
<b>yampa</b>	speak aloud	<b>yampitj</b>	spokesperson, loudspeaker

### b. ‘Having’ suffix –kil

Practically every Australian language has a suffix that is translatable as ‘having’. It corresponds to the *-ed* suffix we find in English in words like *bearded*, *coated* and *left-handed*. In Boandik the suffix is **-kil**.

<b>wiyang</b>	spike, spine	<b>wiyangkil</b>	echidna (spikes-having)
<b>malang</b>	wife	<b>malangkil</b>	married (of a man) (wife-having)

From what we know of more fully recorded languages, we can see **-kil** as having wide scope in Boandik. It could be used in creating new words. For instance, if we add it to one of the words for vegetable food, it could provide a word for greengrocer:

<b>bungang</b>	vegetable food	<b>bungangkil</b>	greengrocer
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Besides being useful for catering for new meanings, **-kil** is also useful for producing adjectives. We have a Boandik word for 'fat' (the substance), namely **marntpuli**, so we can add **-kil** to produce **marntpulikil** (fat-having) 'fat', 'obese'. We have **lakalawa** 'poison', so with the addition of **-kil** we can produce **lakalawakil** 'poisonous'. Some of the texts used for the PowerPoint lessons are bio-sketches of famous Aboriginal Australians, and **Ngawayn Nroyti-kil** (voice honey-having) proved useful for translating 'honey voice', one of the epithets applied to the late Jimmy Little (a popular Aboriginal singer).

**c. Noun → Transitive verb -ma**

Transitive verbs can be formed from nouns with the addition of **-ma**, and perhaps from verbs (see **kulima**).

<b>kan</b>	up	<b>kanma</b>	lift
<b>kulinyi</b>	hide oneself	<b>kulima</b>	hide something
<b>wirat</b>	string, whip, noose, halter	<b>wiratama</b>	to tie, to twist
<b>wirn</b>	sharp point, spear point	<b>wirnma</b>	sharpen

**d. Kunga as a causative**

There is also **kunga**, a verb meaning 'do' or 'make', which can be used as a causative. In some examples such as the following it appears to be compounded with an intransitive verb,

<b>kuli, kuwi</b>	be angry	<b>kuwi-kunga</b>	annoy, irritate
<b>puwi</b>	be clean	<b>puwi-kunga</b>	to clean

but it is clearly separate in

**kuwi=ngayn kunga** (angry=me-make) 'He makes me angry'

**e. Nominal → intransitive verb -inya**

Intransitive verbs can be formed from nouns with the addition of the suffix **-inya**, as in the example below.

<b>krambu</b>	vomit (noun)	<b>krambuwinya</b>	to vomit
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If an English word is borrowed into an Australian language as an intransitive verb, it would normally have to take a suffix like **-inya**. **Yelo-inya** has been recorded for 'scream'. This may be an example based on English 'yell'.

**3. Extension of meaning**

As expected, the Boandik extended the meaning of words to accommodate new referents. For example, **ngula**, the word for the traditional hut or camp, was extended to cover European houses

and other buildings as in **Pina ngula**, ‘redgum house’ for the first hotel in Penola. The township name *Penola* is a reduction of **Pina-ngula**. The following are recorded examples:

<b>ngula</b>	camp, mia-mia	house, building
<b>wari</b>	track, path	road
<b>piyatung</b>	lightning	electricity
<b>nankoru</b>	broad beach grass, alcohol inedible food, poison	

Below are some extensions that have been introduced in the PowerPoint lessons:

<b>wari</b>	track, path	<b>martung wari</b>	good trip! good road
<b>mankut</b>	round, ball	<b>mankut</b>	football
<b>waa</b>	crow	<b>Waa-ngara</b>	The Crows (crow-plural football team)
<b>ngirri</b>	eagle	<b>ngirri</b>	plane
<b>ngirri</b>	eagle	<b>Ngirri-ngara</b>	The Eagles (eagle-plural football team)

Extension is such a natural process that it can come about without much conscious thought. **Kromilayt** (or **kromilatj**), one of several words recorded for ‘red’, has come to refer to red wine among some of the new speakers of the language who enjoy the odd red.

#### 4. Word borrowing

Languages often borrow words to cover new referents. In the case of Boandik we can distinguish two possibilities: borrowing from another vernacular or borrowing from English. In pre-contact times there was borrowing in both directions between Boandik and neighbouring dialects of both Kulin and the Warrnambool language. In the Kulin languages there is a ‘having’ suffix **-pil/-bil** with variants **-wil** and **-mil**. It appears on several Boandik words indicating a Kulin origin.

<i>Source</i>	<i>Source form</i>	<i>Boandik</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Kulin	<b>-bil</b> ‘having’	<b>malambil</b>	married (lit. wife-ed) (cf. <b>malangkil</b> )
Kulin	<b>liyawil</b>	<b>liyawil</b>	type of club (lit. ‘tooth-ed’)
Kulin	<b>ngatwil</b>	<b>ngatwil</b>	type of club

Currently there are protocols against borrowing from other Australian languages without permission of the custodians of the language. Two Boandik women filled in a gap in our Boandik corpus by getting permission from the Warrnambool people to use **wuwu** for ‘goodbye’.

## 5. Calquing

Calquing, or loan translation, is a way of borrowing ideas (rather than words) from other vernaculars or English. In some languages the word for ‘tears’ is literally ‘eye-water’, and that is what we find in Boandik and neighbouring languages. The word for ‘brain’ is literally ‘egg-head’ in the Yartwatjali and Tjapwurrung tongues. There is no word recorded for ‘brain’ in Boandik, but there are words for ‘egg’ and ‘head’, so one can calque ‘egg-head’ in Boandik, and there is a fair chance that this was in fact the Boandik word for ‘brain’. Below are some other possibilities.

<i>Yartwatjali</i>	<i>Tjapwurrung</i>	<i>Warrnambool</i>	<i>Boandik</i>	<i>English</i>
<b>katjin mir</b>	<b>katjin mir</b>	<b>parritj mirng</b>	<b>parri maa</b>	tears
water-eye	water-eye	water-eye	water-eye	
<b>mirk-purp</b>	<b>mirk-purp</b>	-	<b>kula-pup?</b>	brain
egg-head	egg-head		egg-head	
<b>wart mir</b>	<b>wart mir</b>	<b>wart mirng</b>	<b>wart maa?</b>	eyelid
back-eye	back-eye	back-eye	back-eye	
<b>witjin mir</b>	<b>ngarrat mir</b>	<b>ngarat mirng</b>	<b>ngarla maa?</b>	eyelash
feather-eye	hair-eye	hair-eye	hair eye	

The calque for ‘brain’ proved useful when Brooke Joy and Michelle Jacquelin-Furr recently wanted to translate ‘Colour is a state of mind’:

**Monal ba mamun pup-u, kula-pup-u.**

black and white head-loc, brain-loc

## 6. Areal words

The other way one can fill in gaps by borrowing from other languages is to use words with an areal distribution, words that are common to several tongues, and not the particular property of any one tongue. A good example is with the word for ‘neck’. It is not recorded in Boandik, but is **nyani** or **nyaning** in various Kulin tongues and **nhanin** in dialects of the Warrnambool language. This means **nyani** or **nhani** can reasonably be used, and it is highly likely that **nyani** was the Boandik word for ‘neck’.

<i>English</i>	<i>Yartwatjali</i>	<i>Tjapwurrung</i>	<i>Warrnambool</i>	<i>Boandik</i>
bush turkey	<b>lawan</b>	<b>lawan</b>	<b>lawin</b>	<b>lawan?</b>
crater	<b>?</b>	<b>kulkut</b>	<b>kulkut</b>	<b>kulkut</b>
kangaroo rat	<b>patjuk</b>	<b>patjuk</b>	<b>paruk</b>	<b>paruk?</b>
leave	<b>winaka</b>	<b>winaka</b>	<b>wanaka</b>	<b>winaka?</b>

off/behind

Murray pine	<b>marru</b>	<b>marrung</b>	<b>marrung</b>	<b>marrung?</b>
neck (nape)	<b>nyani</b>	<b>nyani</b>	<b>nhanin</b>	<b>nyani?</b>
yabby	<b>yapitj</b>	<b>yapitj</b>	<b>yapitj</b>	<b>yapitj?</b>

## 7. English loan words

Words which have been borrowed from English, from the nineteenth century, and recorded, all conform to Boandik phonology. Obviously borrowing from English will continue, though words will not necessarily be assimilated to Boandik word shapes.

<i>English source</i>	<i>Boandik</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
cap	<b>kep</b>	cap
dinner	<b>dina</b>	dinner
gaol, jail	<b>djel</b>	gaol, jail
letter	<b>lata</b>	paper
nail	<b>nel</b>	nail
pipe	<b>payip</b>	pipe
ship	<b>tyip</b>	ship
tarpaulin	<b>tapulin</b>	tent
white man	<b>waynman</b>	white man

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that quality lexicon are important ingredients for language revival programs, but if we are to use a language in the modern context, it is also necessary to have linguistic mechanisms to expand the lexicon to fill the inevitable gaps. Some of the techniques available to the Boandik language have been demonstrated, with examples.

Experience tells us that involving the right people – Elders, key community members and the younger generation – in the revival processes is essential. You need people with fire in their bellies to commit to the project for the long haul, and who are prepared to put the hard work and time into organizing, attending and actively participating in workshops. It is at workshops that the requests flow in for new words and names for places and institutions. Without the Mount Gambier workshops, Blake's 2003 book on Boandik would have continued to languish on the shelves of university libraries.

Blake continues to attend Boandik workshops, as the consultant linguist, with more planned for 2014. And between workshops he produces further Boandik resources, including up-dated wordlists, and PowerPoint lessons, organized by topic. These lessons contain many practical sentences for modern communication purposes. Both Blake and I feel privileged to have attended the first six workshops held in Mount Gambier, and to offer assistance in the process of Boandik language development and expansion – which is now unstoppable. As the confidence grows among the regular workshop attenders, it is exciting to see them producing their own resources and developing new Boandik terms for new concepts.

But the community of Mount Gambier would agree with me in saying we are fortunate that Blake has chosen to breathe life back into the Boandik language in particular, considering it has lain dormant for possibly more than one hundred years... Just as the ancestral giant, Craitbul, in the Dreaming story of the Mount Gambier region, has re-emerged from the volcanic crater of Berrin to appear on the outer wall of the council chambers every night.

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