

Victorian languages: Old texts to new texts – A case study in Boonwurrung
Alex Blaszak- V.A.C.L.

Like many of the languages of Victoria, some vocabulary, grammar notes, religious texts, speeches and 'everyday' dialogues relating to Boonwurrung, a Central Kulin language of Coastal Melbourne, were recorded by European collectors from the time of settlement. It is largely these records, as well as a late recording of partial speakers by Luise Hercus, from which knowledge of Boonwurrung exists.

Communities are recognising the power of using their traditional language to strengthen their cultural identity and enhance their ancestral stories. As such their interest in the old sources is to capture language that they can identify specifically as their own, and then to undertake the linguistic processes necessary to render the language useful to them.

It is this resurgence of community interest now that is motivating work on some of these languages and their old source material, to take a new focus. The old sources have been used by linguists and community members alike to reconstruct new texts, such as the relexified stories of Boonwurrung Elder Carolyn Briggs.

The community importance placed on identification of the language has led to investigations into deciphering more specifically to which people/language/country the old texts and records of language may be attributed.

In an academic context, that is an Honours thesis, the question of identification of varieties is to be examined through phonology. Hypothesising upon the provenance of particular texts will form the basis from which to examine phonological detail in terms of Boonwurrung and its neighbouring varieties, Taunurong and Woiwurrung.