The language of the Adelaide Plains

Kulurdu Marni Ngathaitya! Sounds Good to Me!

A Kaurna Learner’s Guide

ROB AMERY and JANE SIMPSON, ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNE BEST


Few resources exist to assist the learner of Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains, South Australia. This Kaurna Learners’ Guide, Kulurdu Marni Ngathaitya!, has been developed as a step-by-step guide for learning to speak the language and to assist those teachers of Kaurna language. It assumes no previous knowledge, though of course many Kaurna people will know some of the language already.

Organised into two main sections, part one (chapters 1–16) introduces common words and expressions for use in a range of contexts on topics that are often spoken about, allowing the learner to dive straight into the language. Part two (chapters 17–25) guides the learner through various aspects of Kaurna grammar and sentence construction and provides more detailed explanation. Language learning is rewarding. Learning Kaurna can provide insights into Kaurna culture and the way of thinking of Kaurna people as they lived in the nineteenth century.

‘[W]hen I first looked at [this book], it almost brought tears to my eyes, I liked it so much … This book is a great model for an extremely useful set of materials for people trying to learn a ‘sleeping’ language.’
– Professor Leanne Hinton, Professor Emerita, Linguistics, University of California – Berkeley

‘Awakening a sleeping beauty tongue is a remarkable achievement of ethical, aesthetic and utilitarian significance. This textbook is an exquisite contribution to Revivalistics, a new field emerging in the wake of greater concern about intangible heritage, intellectual sovereignty, human wellbeing and social justice. Kulurdu marni ngathaitya!’ – Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann, Chair of Linguistics and Endangered Languages, The University of Adelaide

Rob Amery started working with Kaurna in 1989 and began running Kaurna language workshops in the early 1990s. He then studied the language intensively for a PhD which was published in 2000. Rob has published widely on the Kaurna language and efforts to reclaim it and has been instrumental in setting up programs in schools and universities. Working together with Kaurna people, he continues to research many aspects of the language. In 2002, together with Kauwanu Lewis and Ngarpadla Alitya, he set up Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi to plan and develop the language and to establish a process to deal with numerous requests for names and translations.

Jane Simpson studied Linguistics at ANU in 1975–76 where she undertook a major assignment on the Kaurna language, tracking down old sources. She has taken a keen interest in Kaurna and other closely related Thura-Yura languages ever since. In 1991 she made the handwritten Teichelmann (1857) Kaurna wordlist available in typescript and electronic form.

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