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CoE for the Dynamics of Language

**The semantics of emotive interjections  
in Dalabon and Barunga Kriol  
(Top End, Northern Territory)**

# INTRODUCTION

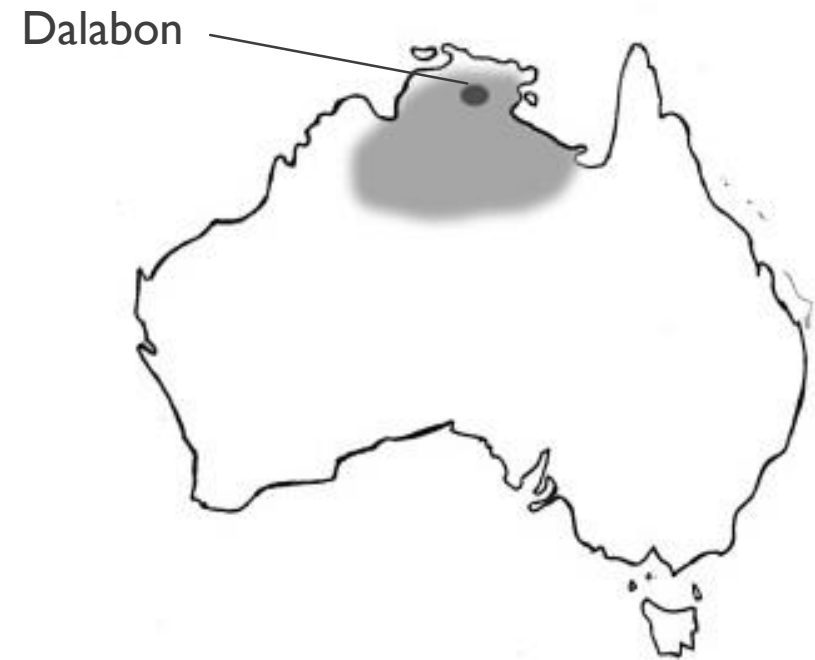
2

- Some notions about interjections.
  - Why don't we know more about them.
  - Why their expressive dimension is interesting.
- The system of Dalabon core emotive interjections.
- The system of Barunga Kriol core emotive interjections.
- Comparison.

# INTRODUCTION

3

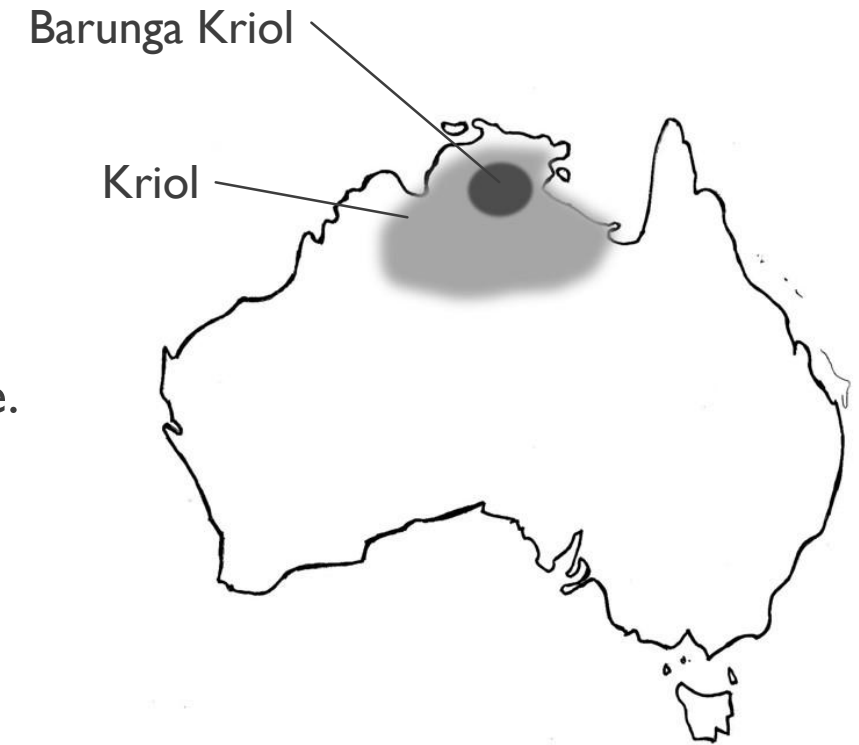
- **Dalabon** (Gunwinyguan)
- Existing description of emotive interjections.
- Ponsonnet (2014)
- A potential local substrate of Barunga Kriol.



# INTRODUCTION

4

- **Barunga Kriol**
  - (Sandefur 1979, 1986, Schultze-Berndt et al. 2013, Ponsonnet 2011...).
- A variety of Kriol.
  - 20 to 30,000 speakers.
- Barunga Kriol has a few thousand speakers to the east of Katherine.
  - Around Barunga and further.



# INTRODUCTION

5

- **Not trying to assess substrate influence**
- **Comparing systems** with a view on cross-linguistic description.
- Assessing differences in terms of **emotional communication**.
- In the context of cultural/language shift.

# INTRODUCTION

6

- **Emotive interjections** (Ameka 1992)
- **Core vs non-core** interjections.
- A handful of emotive interjections that are much more frequent than others.

# INTRODUCTION

7

- **On the semantics of interjections**
- Interjections are **inherently versatile** semantically.
  - Goffman (1978), Kockelman (2003)
- Intra- and inter-speaker variation.
- **Quantitative methods** are necessary.
- And consider how contexts **bundle** together.

	<i>woywoy</i> (24)	<i>weh-no</i> (50)	<i>bordo(h)</i> (27)
personal regrets/self compassion		6%	7%
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relief/rejoicing for others	13%	3%	13%
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# INTRODUCTION

8

- **The typology of emotive interjections?**
- Very little is known on the typology of emotive interjections.
- What semantic categories are usually in focus cross-linguistically?
- What bundles of contexts often come together?
- Wierzbicka (1992)



# INTRODUCTION

9

- **Emotive interjections and emotional experience**
- Interjections are simple expressive signals
- Goffman's (1978) response cries.
- **Interjective responses** flag contexts that have emotional salience for a speaker.
- **Interjections** tell us about speaker's emotional experience and categories.
- Tells us something about speakers emotional experience and its categorization.

# INTRODUCTION

10

- **Methodology**
- First-hand data collected in the field.
- Corpus-based.
- Dalabon, 60 hours (2007-2014)
  - 5 female speakers, all mature.
  - Ponsonnet (2014).
- Kriol, 15 hours (2014-2015)
  - ~20 mostly female speakers aged 8-80+.

The screenshot shows a video player interface with a menu bar (Fichier, Edition, Annotation, Acteur, Type, Rechercher, Affichage, Options, Fenêtre, Aide) and a toolbar with playback controls. The video shows a person sitting on a blue tarp in a field. The subtitle track displays the following text:

Time	Text
00:01:12.000	ngorr bulah-duy-kang
00:01:12.200	ngorr
00:01:12.400	bulah-duy-ka-ng
00:01:12.600	12pi
00:01:12.800	pron
00:01:13.000	pron pref-TAM->I-TAM
00:01:13.200	They welcomed us.
00:01:13.400	check new entry duy-ka, here translated as 'be happy to see someone' MT201106
00:01:13.600	ngorr bulah-ru-rok-duy-kang
00:01:13.800	ngorr
00:01:14.000	bulah-ru-rok-duy-ka-ng
00:01:14.200	12pi
00:01:14.400	pron
00:01:14.600	pron pref-TAM inc n-<I-TAM
00:01:14.800	they welcomed us as we arrived.

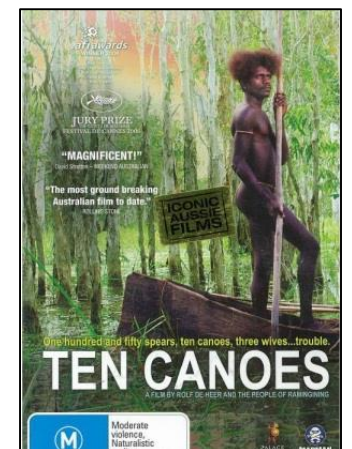
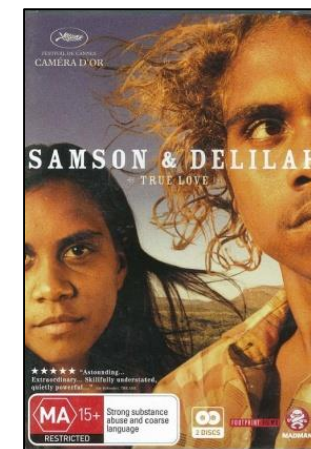
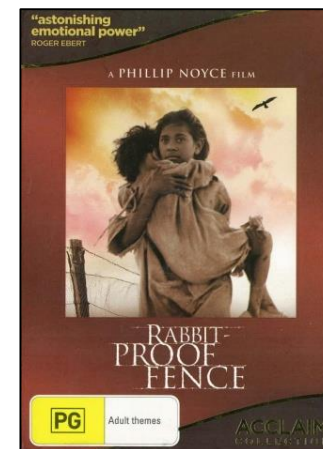
# INTRODUCTION



- Narratives.
- Various visual stimuli.
- Movies.



Photos courtesy of Vertigo Production, Jabal Film Pty Ltd, Scarlett Pictures Pty Ltd.



# INTRODUCTION

12

- **Data sets for this study**
- Two comparable subcorpora
- ~7 hours for each language
- Commensurable content: same proportion of elicitation type, same stimuli...



# **CORE EMOTIVE INTERJECTIONS IN DALABON**



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- 3 core emotive interjections
- compassion is in focus

# DALABON

15

- **On compassion among the Dalabon group**
- Something bad happens to someone else and I feel bad about it.
- Compassion is **emphatically morally approved** and is the pivot of the emotional moral system.
  - Reported for other Australian groups (Myers 1979, 1986).
- You owe compassion to others, especially kin, and they owe it to you.
- **Sharing and caring** is a proxy for compassion among these groups.

# DALABON

16

- **On compassion among the Dalabon group**
- Central category for Dalabon interjections.
- Other Gunwinyguan languages also have compassionate interjections.
- And Barunga Kriol.
- Other Australian languages?



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## ■ Compassion

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]

(1) *Bala-h-dja-Ing-ru-n*

3pl-R-FOC-SEQ-cry-PR

*bulkkidj*

really

***weh-no***

INTJ. comp.gen

*wurdurd.*

child



‘They’re just really crying, poor kids.’

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- Witnessing sharing and caring: endearment at and approval of compassion.

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]

(2) **Woywoy**...      *Bulu*      *ka-h-naHna-n-wurd*,      *bulu*      *ka-h-djukkodjukko-n*.  
INTJ.compassion 3pl      3sg>3-R-see:REDUP-DIM      3pl      3sg>3-R-wash:REDUP-PR



‘Oh... She looks after them, she (kindly) washes them [she gives them a shower].’

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- Intimacy, personal routines (Ponsonnet 2014)
- A relatively ‘culturally specific’ category?
- Expressive features that encode compassion in Dalabon often bundle with intimacy.
  - E.g. diminutives, intonation contours.
  - Also true in other Gunwinyguan languages.

[Samson and Delilah]

(3) *Ka-h-marru-yarrk-mu*  
3sg-R-hair-comb-PR

***bordo.***  
INTJ.surprise



‘Oh look she’s combing her hair.’

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- *woywoy*
- compassion
  
- *weh-no*
- compassion
- positive, self
- more frequent
  
- *bordoh*
- surprise
- compassion

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- compassion
  
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- positive, self
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- *bordoh*
- surprise
- compassion



## ■ Surprise

[A turtle has been caught.]

- (4) *Wulk-no!*     ***Bordoh***     *kurrubbirl-ngan*     *nga-h-ngungu-n!*  
fat                    INTJ.surprise   short.neck.turtle-1sgPOSS   1sg>3-R-eat:REDUP-PR



‘The fat! Goodness my turtle, I’m eating it!’

## ■ Criticism

[Samson and Delilah]

- (5) ***Bordoh.***     *Mhmm.*                    *Ka-h-kodj-mayah-mu*     *kanh*     *beddrol-yen.*  
INTJ.surprise   INTJ.dispapprob   3sg-R-head-get.lost-PR   DEM   petrol-EFF



‘Goodness. Hmh. He’s crazy because of the petrol [he is sniffing].’

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# **BARUNGA KRIOL OVERVIEW**



## DALABON

## KRIOL

	<i>woywoy</i> (24)	<i>weh-no</i> (50)	<i>bordo(h)</i> (27)	<i>bobala</i> (133)	<i>bala</i> (112)	<i>oh</i> (40)	<i>kaja/iinga</i> (21)
personal regrets		6%	7%	7%	2%		
nostalgia				2%			
rejoicing for self		4%					
relief/rejoicing for others	13%	3%	13%	6%	5%		
compassion (negative)	<b>22%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>81%</b>	5%	
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positive surprise, approval						10%	
disbelief							10%
fear, stupefaction							5%
critical/dissatisfied surprise			13%			10%	14%
criticism, reproach, anger						2%	<b>57%</b>

# OVERVIEW

29

- *bobala* > Eng. *poor fellow*
- Most frequent interjection.
- Typically **compassionate**.

# OVERVIEW

30

- Compassion.

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]

(6) *Na yuluk? tubala nogud binji bla im bobala.*  
EMPH CONJ 3du bad belly DAT 3sg INTJ.comp



‘And there look they two are upset about her poor thing.’

- Witnessing sharing and caring: approving compassion

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]

(7) *Yeah bobala im-in get olebat taka en*  
INTJ.approb INTJ.comp 3sg-PST get 3pl food and

*im-in wanim fid-im olebat bobala*  
3sg-PST HESIT feed-TR 3pl INTJ.comp



‘Yeah oh good she gave them food and she whatyoucallit fed them good on her.’

# OVERVIEW

31

- *bala* *bobala* with aphaeresis > Eng. *poor fellow*
- In my corpus, 20% less frequent than *bobala*.
- But with a generational bias: *bala* is prevalent among younger speakers.
  - 50% more *bala* than *bobala* for most speakers under 30, one of them did not even use *bobala*.
- Also **compassionate**.

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]

(8) *Tubala wokwok wan im naitaim na bala.*  
3du walk:REDUP when 3sg night.time EMPH INTJ.comp



‘They two walk by night indeed poor things.’

# OVERVIEW

32

- *oh*
- Surprise, usually neutral.
- Registering new facts, often contrary to expectation.
- Same usage as in English.
- Also occurs in Dalabon, albeit less frequently.
- Is it a ‘universal interjection’?
- Dingemanse, Torreira & Enfield 2013



# OVERVIEW

33

- *kaja, kajinga*
- One is a syncoped version of the other, but the full version is rare in my corpus.
- > Ngukurr region, with reference to genitals (Sandefur 1985:210).
- Surprise, mostly negative.
- Criticism, reproach.

- *kaja, kajinga*
- Surprise, usually negative

[Rabbit-Proof Fence]  
(9) **Kaja** wat dat trein!  
INTJ.neg.surp what DET train

‘Jesus what’s this [terrible] train!’



- Criticism, reproach

(10) *Im haid-im mi dis gel iya kajinga!*  
3sg hide-TR 1sg DET girl here INTJ.repr

‘She’s hiding me this girl here, come one!’





# COMPARISON



# WHAT IS COMMON

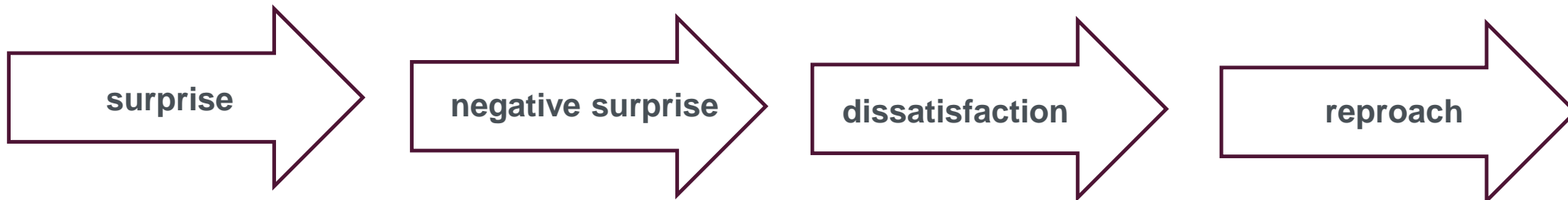
36

- **A resemblance in very broad terms**
- **Compassion** is in semantic focus for several interjections.
- Other Gunwinyguan languages also have one or several dedicated compassionate interjections.
- Probably not a universal feature?
- Rather a regional or continental one?

# WHAT IS COMMON

37

- **A resemblance in very broad terms**
- And there are interjections that express **surprise**.
- As well as **dissatisfaction and criticism**.
- This could reflect universal tendencies?
  - Languages tend to have (at least one) frequent surprise interjection?
  - Surprise interjections bundle with criticism and reproach?



# WHAT DIFFERS

38

- **Categories**
- **Surprise and reproach**
- There is a clearer category of reproach distinct from surprise.
  - *oh*        neutral surprise, emphasis etc.
  - *kaja*      negative surprise, reproach

## DALABON

## KRIOL

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# WHAT DIFFERS

40

- **Categories**
- **Surprise and reproach**
- There are more interjective responses in these contexts in Kriol.
- 7% of all interjective responses in the Kriol corpus have a critical dimension vs 3% in Dalabon corpus.



# WHAT DIFFERS

41

- **Categories**
- **Intimacy**
- When the speaker witnesses intimate, personal routines.
- The intimacy context has disappeared.

## DALABON

## KRIOL

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# WHAT DIFFERS

43

- **Intimacy**
- Typically bundles with compassionate contexts in Dalabon.
- A relatively ‘culturally specific’ category.
- But not attested for Barunga Kriol interjections.

# WHAT DIFFERS

44

- **Categories**
- **Approving compassion**
- Stable in terms of percentage of interjective responses across the corpora.
- But there is a generational bias.
- Only 4 tokens by speakers under 30 y.o. (/total of 31 tokens).

# WHAT DIFFERS

45

- **Categories**
- **Endearment**
- Younger Kriol speakers produced many interjective responses when watching old photos.
  - Primarily *bala* and *bobala*, sometimes *kaja*.
- Dalabon speakers used *bobala* in such contexts.

(11) AP...            **Bala**            *garra*            *shet!*  
first.name        INTJ.comp        with            shirt

‘AP... Oh dear with a shirt!’



# WHAT DIFFERS

46

- **Categories**
- **Endearment**
- Barunga Kriol also has two non-core interjections dedicated to endearment.
  - *anyany*
  - *gi:n*
- Endearment is becoming more prominent?
- Comparable shift with conventionalized intonation contours.
  - (Ponsonnet in prep.)



# **SOME CONCLUSIONS**



# SOME CONCLUSIONS

48

- **Same**
- Expression of compassion is prominent.
  - Is it an Australian feature?
- Alongside with expression of surprise.
  - Could be universal?



# SOME CONCLUSIONS

49

- **Different**
- The categories that bundle with compassion are less prominent.
  - Approval of compassion is in decline.
  - Intimacy is absent.
- Endearment is also an emerging category.
  - A different aspect of empathy.
- There is a relatively frequent interjection that focuses on negative surprise and reproach.
  - Which contrasts with compassion.

# SOME CONCLUSIONS

50

- **Different**
- The structure and usage profile of interjections and interjective responses suggest that
- compassion is losing ground as a corner stone of this part of the communication system?
  
- What about other Australian languages?
- And elsewhere?



**THANK YOU**

