Aspects of the semantics of intellectual subjectivity in Dalabon (south-western Arnhem Land)

Maïa Ponsonnet

Paris 8-Saint-Denis University, Paris

Abstract: This paper explores the semantics of subjectivity (views, intentions, the self as a social construct, etc.) in Dalabon, a severely endangered language of northern Australia, and in Kriol, the local creole. Considering the status of Dalabon and the importance of Kriol in the region, Dalabon cannot be observed in its 'original' context, as the traditional methods of linguistic anthropology tend to recommend. This paper seeks to rely on this very parameter, reclaiming linguistic work and research as a legitimate conversational context. Analyses are thus based on metalinguistic statements — among which are translations in Kriol. Far from seeking to separate Dalabon from Kriol, I use interactions between them as an analytical tool. The paper concentrates on three Dalabon words: men-no ('intentions', 'views', 'thoughts'); kodj-no ('head') and kodj-kulu-no ('brain'). None of these words strictly matches the concept expressed by the English word 'mind'. On the one hand, men-no is akin to consciousness but is not treated as a container nor as a processor; on the other, kodj-no and kodj-kulu-no are treated respectively as container and processor, but they are clearly physical body parts, while what English speakers usually call 'the mind' is essentially distinct from the body. Interestingly, the body part kodj-no ('head') also represents the individual as a social construct — while the Western 'self' does not match physical attributes. Besides, men-no can also translate as 'idea', but it can never be abstracted from subjectivity — while in English, potential objectivity is a crucial feature of ideas. Hence the semantics of subjectivity in Dalabon does not reproduce classic 'Western' conceptual articulations. I show that these specificities persist in the local creole.

Introduction

Subjectivity is a major topic in many social sciences — in anthropology in particular. However, intellectual subjectivity is a difficult question and has been given scant attention in the anthropological literature. In this paper, I lean on linguistic analysis of a well-defined corpus in order to shed some light on this complex matter. This tangible basis provides a solid grounding that allows me to present further analysis of Dalabon and Kriol on the one hand, and to articulate broader views on intellectual subjectivity on the other. Subjectivity is understood here as the realm of what is specific to the person, the person being understood indifferently either as essentially individual or as essentially constituted by his or her inscription within a social framework. For the sake of clarity and conciseness, I have chosen to deal exclusively with intellectual subjectivity in this paper. Subjectivity of feelings and affects will be the topic of another paper (Ponsonnet in preparation).

Evans (2007) provides a thorough description of the semantic domain of (some) intellectual states and mechanisms in Dalabon.[1] He outlines a description of the morphemes and lexemes used in Dalabon to refer to what we would call 'the mind' in English. Thanks to the corpus gathered recently, it is now possible to elaborate on these suggestions. Evans (2007) identifies the root *men*, glossed as 'social conscience or attitude', but notes that the noun *men-no* was not attested at the time that he wrote his paper. In Evans's data, *men* would only appear as a bound morpheme. It has now been repeatedly and clearly attested, and it is thus possible to refine our understanding of it. Evans (2007) also mentions the morpheme *kodj*, which is used to form the lexeme *kodj-no*, referring to the physical head. It has also been further documented in the interim. Having gained some insight into the compound lexeme *kodj-kulu-no*, which refers to the physical brain, and about a series of verbs that can be formed with *kodj*, it is possible to sketch new interpretations of the semantics of *kodj* and *kodj-kulu*. These new insights will be used to sketch a new perspective on the semantics of (intellectual) subjectivity in Dalabon. The paper then takes a closer look at the translations of *men-no* in Kriol, and observes that Kriol seems, in this case and at this stage, to retain some of the specificities displayed in Dalabon regarding the semantics of subjectivity.

Context and method[2]

This paper relies on data gathered in October 2007 during the course of a research project entitled 'Semantics of reason and mind in Dalabon and Kriol'.[3] Quotations below are drawn from a corpus of some 20 hours of conversations and translation sessions in Dalabon and Kriol. These conversations were recorded in Weemol and Beswick with three older speakers and a few younger speakers who helped with translation.

Kriol is a well-developed creole that now numbers thousands of native speakers across northern Australia and is widely identified as Aboriginal by its speakers. Kriol is the mother tongue of the communities of the south-western Arnhem region, including Weemol and Beswick. Dalabon is a non-Pama-Nyungan prefixing language of the same region, within the Gunwinyguan family.[4] It is a highly endangered language that numbers less than ten speakers at the time of writing. The corpus of Dalabon utterances is therefore limited, and recordings usually contain some Kriol, as well. This necessarily influences analyses of Dalabon semantics, if only because our knowledge of Dalabon will always remain partial and cannot rely firmly on observations 'in context', as the context of utterance has to be re-created. But rather than considering the context as unsatisfying or trying to get rid of the influence of Kriol, the methodology outlined here seeks instead to rely on these parameters.

Linguistic work and research is one of the few contexts in which Dalabon is still extensively spoken today, and I seek to reclaim this context as a legitimate conversational context. My assumption is that the disqualification of such 'intercultural' contexts as 'artificial' is not valid. The methodological counterpart of this stance is that metalinguistic elicitations become crucial, as they are central in the corpus (for further developments about the importance of metalinguistic documentation, see Evans and Sasse 2007). While the semantic structures of the proposed languages are being scrutinised, the (bilingual) metalinguistic explanations provided by speakers, and therefore the way speakers make sense of the semantic patterns in their own languages, are also of themselves being studied. Using this methodological framework, observation of the properties of language, as such, will of course remain relevant. In this paper, it will be appropriate to describe the lexical domain and expressions relevant to subjectivity. However, we should not assume that the structure of a language *in itself* conveys a conception of subjectivity. Languages do not conceive of anything: speakers do. I am thus trying to describe the conceptions that are being expressed by speakers of the given language. Since language is the medium that allows expression of these conceptions, the languages will be scrutinised in order to shed some light on the ideas they allow their speakers to express.

Practically speaking, a consequence of this methodological stance is as follows. If we seek to describe, for instance, what the word 'death' means in English, we would of course observe how this word is used. But we would also,

crucially, ask English speakers to explain what they think death is. I believe it is important in order to avoid literal interpretations based on misunderstandings about the way language 'works'. Such misunderstandings would, in the fashion of caricature, lead one to conclude from the observation of the expression 'he's scared to death', for instance, that English speakers believe that one can die from being scared. In a less exaggerated fashion, we might conclude that English speakers associate death and fear. In this example, it would be relevant to consider miscellaneous idiomatic expressions involving the word 'death' in order to understand semantic expressions. In fact, such descriptions are even more relevant in a polysynthetic language like Dalabon, where many words are compounds in which morphemes may often be considered to retain their intrinsic meanings. But the methodology must also pay close attention to metalinguistic definitions articulated by speakers. Only in light of these definitions is it possible to elaborate on the specificities of the structures of language and speech. The corpus of conversations used in this paper contains both metalinguistic elicitations by speakers (in Dalabon and Kriol) and examples of language use (in Dalabon and Kriol), as these items shed light upon each other. I am equally attentive to spontaneous translations of Dalabon into Kriol provided by bilingual speakers. These translations do not necessarily reflect accurately the semantic value of the words they deal with. Nonetheless, they are always expressive and instructive. An inherent risk in this method is misinterpretation or over-interpretation of data: since the researcher necessarily interacts with speakers within the corpus, I had to remain extremely cautious when selecting and analysing quotes.

In a similar fashion, rather than trying to isolate Dalabon from Kriol, I consider the linguistic complex created by the encounter of those languages. As for language description, for the sake of clarity I keep Dalabon and Kriol more or less apart. Nonetheless, their integration is particularly fruitful when metalinguistic definitions are provided, as Kriol translations shed a very useful light on monolingual definitions. The last section of this paper elaborates upon such translations.

Dalabon *men*

The data gathered in 2007 demonstrates that *men* (*men-no*) can stand as a noun, and not only as a bound morpheme associated to other morphemes — a point raised by Evans (2003). In Dalabon some nouns do not stand by themselves and are always accompanied with the suffix *-no*. *Men* appears to be one of those nouns. The suffix *-no* has miscellaneous functions, a prominent one being to mark third person singular possession. Names of body parts are typically accompanied by a possessive suffix, with *-no* as a default when no actual possessor is present in the particular context. The classification of Dalabon nouns presenting this feature deserves in-depth analysis (cf. Evans and Merlan 2001, Cutfield in preparation), but for now let us accept that the substantive form of *men* is always accompanied by a possessive suffix, with *–no* as a default form. I will first deal with occurrences of the substantive, thus written *men-no*. Of course, this paper does not claim to be exhaustive. Each of the examples presented below is more than likely to bear definitions and uses that are not mentioned here.

Example 1 is a qualification of *men-no* that gives an idea of its location.[5] Pointing at his own temple with his finger, a speaker said:

(1) **Men-***no*, *djarra Nunda* **men**-*no*.
   Men-no here this.one **men**-no
   'The **men** is here. This is the **men**.'

Men-no is thus clearly located inside the head. However, interestingly, while *men-no* behaves like body part names to the extent that it takes a possessive suffix, and *-no* as a default suffix, speakers do not seem to consider *men-no* as a body part, as we understand from the following situation. During the field session, consultants were shown the drawing in Figure 1.

While each body part, including the brain, was thoroughly pointed at and named, nothing on the drawing was ever identified as *men-no*. The speaker uttered the phrase in Example 1 as he was looking at the drawing, but when asked about *men-no*, he pointed to his own temple. It should be added that in the course of the research, no occurrence of *men-no* has been observed to bear the locative suffix (*-kah*). No speaker said *men-no-kah*
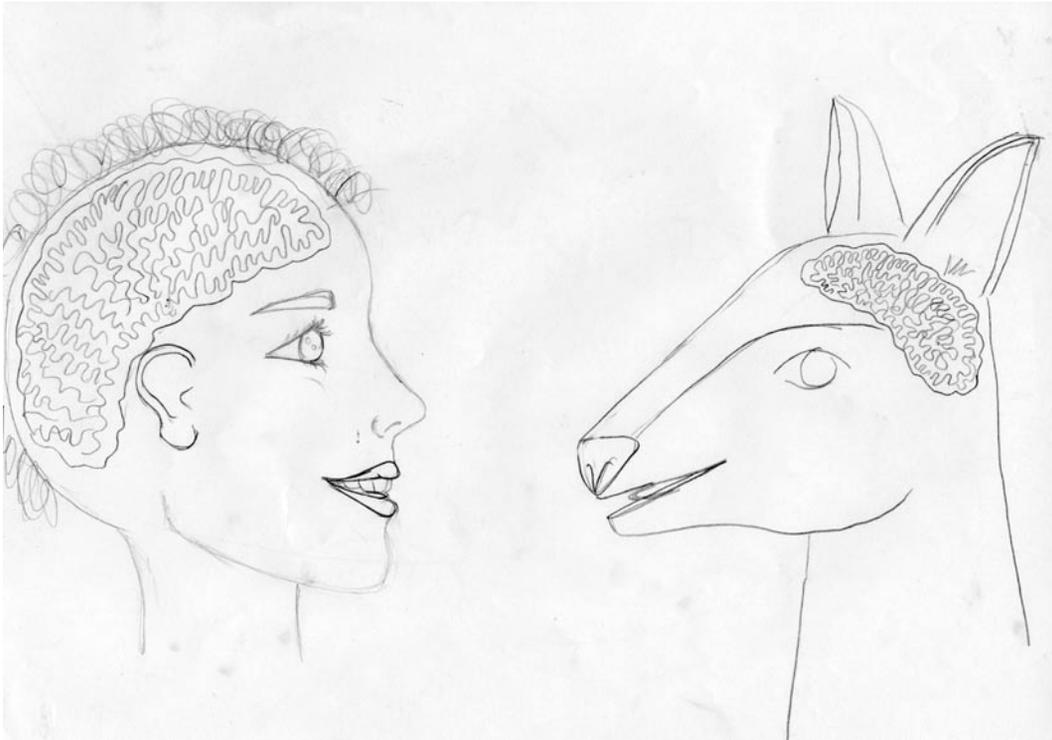
Figure 1: Drawing shown to Dalabon speakers in order to gain understanding of the words discussed in this paper

('in his mind') or *men-ngan-kah* ('in my mind') etc., although there were opportunities and even encouragement to say so. The possibility that this expression may be attested in the future cannot be ruled out categorically. However, I believe that its absence in this corpus, despite favourable contexts and overt suggestion, strongly supports the hypothesis that *men* is not treated as a location. *Men* was never presented as a container (of our thoughts) either. It seems, therefore, that the broadly used mind-as-a-container metaphor does not apply to *men-no*. As we shall see in the analysis below, *men-no* is better understood as content (the content of the head) and not as container.

Men-no is also very directly involved in the expressions of one's views. One can express a personal view in the following fashion.

(2) *Men-ngan,   ngah-yin   kardu   derrh-no*
   men-1sgPOSS 1sg-sayPR   maybe   tomorrow

   kah-dudjmiyan.
   3sg-returnFUT
   'In my **view**, I reckon he'll come back tomorrow.'

The presence of the expression *men-ngan* changes the sense of *yin*, which otherwise is much closer to 'say' and does not usually translate as 'reckon'.[6]

Men can also take the privative suffix *-dih* or the comitative suffix *-dorrungh* to form the expressions *men-dih* ('without *men*') and *men-dorrungh* ('with *men*'). *Men-dorrungh* was used to describe a smart person (e.g. 'someone who has intuition', etc.), but *men-dih* and *men-dorrungh* were also used in a more radical fashion, qualifying 'beings' as follows:

(3) *[Rolu]   kah-**men**-dorrungh.*
   dog(s)   3sg-**men**-COM
   '[Dogs] are endowed with ***men-no**.'*

Free translation: '[Dogs] are **intelligent** beings.'

(4) *[Bordbarng]* *balah-**men**-dih.*
green.ant(s) 3pl-**men**-PRIV
'[Green ants] lack**men**-*no*.'
Free translation: '[Green ants] are **unintelligent** beings.'

Dogs are spontaneously and unanimously attributed *men-no*, and, at the other end of the spectrum, speakers tend to be more hesitant with insects. *Men-no* is attributed or denied on the basis of observable behaviour showing understanding of language and intentions (but not necessarily feelings). To support the claim that dogs have *men-no*, it is argued that they come or go when they are verbally asked to do so, that they understand their names etc. On the same basis, all mammals, as well as some birds, like crows, may be attributed *men-no*, because they fly away if a person comes too close. Even fish can be said to be 'with *men-no*' because they will swim away if they see a shadow move close to the water. Ultimately, insects are not always found to behave in a way that shows that they *understand* what's going on, and they may be denied *men-no*, or, at other times, the matter may be left undecided. Speakers' conclusions about which animals have *men-no* may differ slightly, but their use for behaviour that shows understanding of language and intentions — that is, being conscious — as a criterion seems unanimous.

Thus *men-no* refers to an attribute of a person that is located inside the head (Example 1) but it is rarely treated as a location or as a container. It is linked to judgments, views (Example 2) or bare thinking (as in 'having something in mind' whatever it may be (Examples 3 and 4)) — what, in English, would be termed 'consciousness'. It is therefore a content rather than a container.

As stated by Evans (2007), *men* can also bear the status of a morpheme that is used to derive further expressions. I now present occurrences of *men* within compound expressions. In a number of cases, it is difficult to decide whether *men* should be interpreted as a bound morpheme or as a noun that is incorporated in the verb complex. In Dalabon some nouns are incorporable, which means that they can be inserted between the verb root and its prefixes, instead of standing alone.[7] *Men* is incorporable. As a result, it may not

always be easy to decide whether an expression, such as *men-yin* ('reckon', see Example 5 below), for instance, is a compound verb stem or whether it should be analysed as the verb *yin* with *men* as an incorporated object.[8] While a deeper linguistic analysis may shed some light on this issue, some cases may remain unresolved, and the answer may ultimately depend on speakers' interpretations. Since such decisions do not bear on the current argument, I will leave the issue aside and focus on speakers' interpretations.

In order to express an opinion, the expression *men-yin* ('reckon'), formed with *men* and the simple verb stem *yin*, which means 'to say' or 'to do', is often used. In this corpus, the verb *men-yin* was used more frequently than the expression *men-ngan*, *ngah-yin* exemplified in 'In my view, I reckon' (Example 2), which may be a sign that *men-yin* is being lexicalised.

(5) *Djah-**men**-yin kardu derrh-no kah-dudjmiyan.*
2sg-**men**-sayPR maybe tomorrow 3sg-returnFUT
'You **reckon** that he might come back tomorrow.'

Men is used to derive a number of other words related to opinions. *Djedjarrk-men-rokrok*, for instance, literally 'both together *men* similar', is an adjective that translates as 'to share the same views'.

(6) *Wow, kah-mon, barrah-djadjarrk-**men**-rokrok,*
interj. 3sg-good 3du-together-**men**-similar

kah-mon.
3sg-good
'Well, it's good, them two are of the same **mind**, them two agree, that's good.'

The verb *men-nan* is formed with *men* plus *nan* ('see') and translates as 'to see through someone', 'to see what one thinks'. In the following example, answering a direct question about the sense of *men-nan*, the speaker provides a definition where *men* equates to 'what he/she thinks'.

(7) *Ngah-**men**-nan kardu…kardu kumarruh*
1sg/3sg-**men**-seePR maybe maybe how/what

*kah-**men**-yin.*
3sg-**men**-sayPR
'I **men**-see maybe…maybe, what he **reckons**, how he **thinks**.'

In the metalinguistic statement in Example 7, *men* seems to retain the meaning it is attributed when used as a noun: 'what one thinks', the set

of one's views, judgments. The speaker explains *men-nan* by breaking it down to 'see the *men*', literally.[9]

In addition, *men* also conveys the idea of intentionality, typically in the adverb *men-mungu*. *Men-mungu* was spontaneously translated as 'without *men*' by two speakers. Another speaker confirmed this translation when it was suggested to her. *Men-mungu* clearly differs from *men-dih* (*men* plus privative suffix, see Example 7). While *men-dih* describes unintelligent beings, *men-mungu* describes beings that are endowed with *men* when they act without intention, or without knowing for instance, at some points of their existence. The suffix *mungu*, and the apparently related adverb *munu*, appear to express a particular sort of privation, seemingly linked to intentions. This aspect of Dalabon grammar will be the subject of future research.

Here again, speakers' interpretations retain the sense of the morpheme when it is used in a compound form. *Men-mungu* is understood as expressing the absence of thought or intentions. It may also translate as 'unintentionally' or 'accidentally'.

(8) **Men-mungu**   *Brendan*
     intention.*PRIV*   Brendan

     bukah-ranobahminj
     3sg/3sg.higher-run.overPAST

     mudika-yih.
     car-INST
     'Brendan **accidentally** ran over [my dog] with his car.'

On the basis of Examples 1 to 8 above, we may thus conclude that *men-no* is an attribute of persons and animals that refers to their consciousness (Examples 3 and 4), and is understood as a content and most probably not as a container. *Men-no* refers to the set of one's thoughts (Example 7), views and judgments (Examples 2, 5 and 6), and intentions (Example 8). *Men-no* is located inside the head (Example 1) but it is not considered a body part, as suggested by the reactions to Figure 1 when it was presented to the speakers during the interviews.

Dalabon *kodj* and *kodj-kulu*

Distinct from *men,* the brain depicted in Figure 1 was very clearly named *kodj-kulu-no.* One speak-

er was more specific and defined *kodj-kulu-no* as meninx, or the substance *inside* the brain. Other speakers stated clearly, on the drawing or otherwise, that it was the brain. *Kodj-no* means head, either for a human being or for an animal,[10] and *kodj-kulu-no* means the physical brain.[11] The morpheme *kulu* is found in the expression *mumu-kulu-no*, which Evans et al. (2004) define as the 'marble part' of the eye or the retinal fluid, and in the expression *kolbban-kulu-no*, referring to phlegm, with *kolbban* meaning 'bad cold'. This matches both translations of *kodj-kulu-no*, either as brain or as meninx,[12] with *kulu* conveying both the sense of the core part of an organ and of the core substance. As opposed to *men-no*, *kodj-no* and *kodj-kulu-no* are thus body parts that are clearly used to refer to physical attributes. *Kodj-no* and *kodj-kulu-no* may be used to describe animals as well as human beings. Brain considered as a food supply (in the case of kangaroo for instance) is also called *kodj-kulu-no*.

Kodj-no is often assigned the locative suffix, and may thus ordinarily be given the status of a location, of a physical container, as in Example 9.

(9) *Kah-bengkan*   **kodj**-*no-kah.*
     3sg/3sg-knowPR   **head**-3sgPOSS-LOC
     'He knows in his **head**.'
     Free translation: 'He's got it in mind.'

Kodj-kulu-no was also used with the locative suffix, although less frequently than *kodj-no*. *Kodj-kulu-no* was used several times with the instrumental suffix. It may thus be regarded as a processor.

(10) *Yilah-bengkan*   **kodj-kulu**-*njelng-yih.*
     1pl.excl/3sg-knowPR   **brain**-1pl. exclPOSS-INSTR
     'We know with our **brain**.'

The existence of a verb *kodj-kulu-yurd*, spontaneously (and separately) translated into Kriol by two speakers as *breins wek* ('for the brain to work'), confirms this interpretation.

Kodj and *kodj-kulu* are used to derive a number of expressions referring to mental states. The following expressions in Examples 11 and 12 are very common. Their exact translations in English will vary ('making a (conceptual) mistake', 'being very angry', 'being senile'...) according to the context, that is, according to the reasons why one is in that state. Thus the translations in Examples

11 and 12 vary because the expressions *kodj-mayahmu* and *kodj-kulu-mayahmu* both allow a range of English translations, but the respective range of their possible translations may be considered the same: *kodj-mayahmu* and *kodj-kulu-mayahmu* are synonyms.

(11)   *Kah-**kodj**-mayahmayahmu.*
        3sg-**head**-get.lost.(REDUP).PR
        'He's **mad**.'
        (Or, in different contexts: 'He's making a (conceptual) mistake', 'He's confused', 'He's out of his mind'…)

(12)   *Kah-**kodj-kulu**-mayah.*
        3sg-**brain**-get.lostPR
        'He's making a (conceptual) **mistake**.'
        (Or, in different contexts: 'He's mad', 'He's confused', 'He's out of his mind'…)

Many synonymous expressions describing mental states or activities are derived with both a *kodj* form and a *kodj-kulu* form, for instance *kodj-wokarrun* and *kodj-kulu-wokarrun*, ('wonder'), *kodj-weh* and *kodj-kulu-weh*, ('be disturbed'). *Kodj* and *kodj-kulu* may therefore be considered as semantically associated: they both refer to the 'thinking body part' of the individual. These forms and their variations will be the topic of further research and writing.

Interestingly, although *kodj-no* is firstly defined as a body part, and although a number of expressions derived with the morpheme *kodj* refer to physical features (e.g. *kodj-merlmi*, ('bald'), *kodj-di*, ('be tall'), according to Evans et al. 2004), many expressions formed with *kodj* denote situations where the individual is involved, within a social context.

(13) *Kah-**kodj**-ngalkang   kanh   wurdurd-no.*
      3sg/3sg-**kodj**-findPAST   that   child-3sgPOSS
      'She '**kodj**-found' her child.'
      'She became pregnant.'

In Example 13 *kodj* conveys the idea of the individual being 'found' (*ngalka*: 'find') by the mother as she falls pregnant and the baby manifests itself by being dreamed about. This understanding of *kodj-ngalka* is in line with local traditions, in which pregnancy is understood as a manifestation of an animating spirit giving life to the baby. Several speakers were reluctant to talk about birth

and sexual reproduction. It is therefore difficult to decide whether *kodj-ngalka* refers to the women becoming pregnant, or to the state of pregnancy, or to the event of birth. If it refers to the event of birth, the use of *kodj* in *kodj-ngalka* could thus refer directly to the head appearing when the mother gives birth, and it is tempting to imagine that the sight of the head appearing at birth might have been the origin of the metaphor operating in the expressions with *kodj* that I will be discussing below. This appealing hypothesis deserves further investigation. However, there is no clear sign that contemporary speakers have this picture in mind when they use the term *kodj-ngalka*. In support of this hypothesis, it would in theory be possible to translate Example 13 as 'she found the child's head', since in Dalabon incorporated nouns can also be interpreted as dependants of externally stated objects. However, the fact that, in many occurrences, *kodj-ngalka* is used without *wurdurd-no* as an object, and without an externally stated object at all, shows that this interpretation cannot be sufficient. Indeed, Example 14 shows that *kodj* does actually refer to the baby as a person:

(14) *Bukah-ngalkang.   Kah-kodj-ngalkang.*
      3sg/3higher-findPAST 3sg/3sg-**kodj**-findPAST
      'She found him or her. She **kodj**-found him or her.'

Bukah- is a pronoun specifying both the object and the agent. It is used instead of the simpler form *kah-* when the object is classified as a 'higher' being than the agent (for instance, if a dog bites a human being, *bukah-* will be used, because a human being is 'higher' than an animal) or simply when the object is a person. In Example 14, the speaker makes two equivalent statements, the second one intending to clarify the first one. In the first, the use of *bukah-* shows that the object is a person. In the second, this very same object is *kodj*. Thus, at least in some occurrences, speakers do understand *kodj* as referring to the baby as a person in the expression *kodj-ngalka*.

Kodj is used in many more expressions where it could be understood to denote the individual as integrated in a social context. For example, in a situation in which a child is asking permission to watch television, the verb *djawan* ('ask') is used.

Kodj-djawan seems to be used in socially framed situations, such as requesting access to someone's land, as in Example 15. *Kodj-djawan* can also refer to asking someone out, as in 'dating'.

(15) *Nes*   *kah-**kodj**-djawanj,*   *kanh*
      nurse   3sg/1sg-**kodj**-askPAST   that

      wadjbala-ngong   bale-boninj.
      white-mob

      3plSUBORD-goPAST
      'The nurse '**kodj**-asked' me whether these white men could go [somewhere on my land].'

There are many other examples of expressions formed with the morpheme *kodj* that seem to connote the individual in a social context. This is the case of the noun *kodj-ngan-darrkyi*, defined in Evans et al. (2004) as 'counsel given to one's family', and the verb *kodj-nganjmang*, which was used to describe the social sharing of a kangaroo, but the structure of this verb is yet to be analysed.

Using Examples 9 to 15, we can formulate the hypothesis that *kodj*, while referring, along with *kodj-kulu*, to the physical body part involved in mental states (Examples 11 and 12) as container (Example 9) and processor (Example 10) respectively, may also convey the idea of the socially defined subject (Examples 13 to 15). Although this semantic feature was not explicitly made clear by speakers in the context of metalinguistic statements, Example 16 shows that speakers may also use the expression *kodj* as a morpheme that denotes the subjective individual. *Kodj* was once used in association with the verb *yidjnjan* ('have', 'hold') to form the expression *kodj-yidjnjan*, which could be rendered in that occurrence as 'take care of our soul'.

(16) *[Midjenridj] njel   bulah-marne-breyhmu*
      missionaries 1pl excl   3pl/1pl-BENEF-prayPR

      *njel   bulah-**kodj**-yidjnjan,*
      1pl. exclO   3pl/3sg-**kodj**-holdPR

      nunh   yalah-burrama-mun.   Mak
      this.one   1pl excl-good-becomePR   neg

      yala-lng-moyh-yu.
      1pl exclIRR-then-sick-layPR

      Bulu-ngokorrng-yih   njel
      father-1pl. inclPOSS-ERG   1pl. exclO

kah-yidjnjan.
3sg/1pl-holdPR

Njel   kah-kirrinjhmu
1pl. exclO   3sg-clean.upPR
waral-no-yih.
spirit-3sgPOSS-INSTR

> 'The missionaries pray for us, take care of our **soul**, this way we become good. We are no longer sick. Our father God takes care of us. His spirit clears us up, thanks to his spirit.'

The question recurs as to whether *kodj-yidjnjan* is a compound verb or whether it is the verb *yidjnjan* with the direct object *kodj* incorporated into the verb aggregate. But in any case, the verb *yidjnjan* is transitive. While Dalabon transitive verbs can be used without an overtly stated direct object, in this occasion, *kodj* is a good candidate for that function. If *kodj* is the direct object in the clause *njel bulah-kodj-yidjnan* of Example 16, as I think it is in the speaker's understanding of her own sentence, then it seems that it must be understood as referring to the individual, the self, rather than strictly to a body part.[13] This interpretation supports the hypothesis that the speaker was consciously associating the concept of person as a subject to *kodj*.

Summary

In Dalabon *men* is a morpheme that can convey (perhaps among other things) the idea of someone's subjective views, judgments or intentions. *Men-no* means the set of one's thoughts, judgments, intentions. *Men-no* is not on a par with body parts. While it is attributed a location (inside the head), it does not seem of itself a location or a container: we make better sense of *men-no* if we think of content instead of container. A creature can be said to have a *men-no* if its behaviour shows that it understands language and intentions: it is linked to consciousness. This sounds fairly similar to the way an English speaker might describe the mind, except that the mind would usually be thought of as a location (e.g. 'I didn't have that point in mind'). This is an important difference between the English and Dalabon concept. Nor have I found that *men-no* was ever considered the source of anything either, which would seem

to induce that the mind-as-a-processor metaphor (also broadly used) does not apply.

Men-no is inside the head, but it is not the brain, which is called *kodj-kulu-no*. *Kodj-no* and *kodj-kulu-no*, respectively 'head' and 'brain', are associated with mental processes. *Kodj-no* is often interpreted as the location where they take place, and *kodj-kulu-no* seems to be regarded as a processor. *Kodj* and *kodj-kulu* occur in derived expressions used to describe intellectual confusion, intelligence and other intellectual processes or states. *Kodj* also seems to convey the idea of the individual as socially defined, as supported by a number of expressions formed with *kodj* and used in situations involving the individual, or self, within its social framework. In my view, this also differs significantly from the English pattern, as most English speakers would probably associate the head and the brain with neurons and physical implements rather than with the self understood as a social construct.

Kriol translations of Dalabon men-no and a comparison with English roots

Speakers spontaneously translate *men-no* as *main* (< Eng. 'mind') and *aidiya* (< Eng. 'idea') in Kriol. There are further translations, but these two are recurrent. The English roots of these lexemes are transparent. However, as considered below, Kriol semantics may not rely on English so heavily. The three-folded comparison of Dalabon *men-no*, of Kriol *main* and *aidiya*, and of their English roots 'mind' and 'idea', provides interesting insights.

The English noun *mind* can mean 'view': 'I changed my mind', 'I made up my mind' etc. (which may be compared to the use of *men-ngan* in *men-ngan, ngah-yin*, 'in my view, I reckon'). However, most English speakers would certainly define the mind as a personal device that contains (and is possibly the source of) our personal views and judgments. The expression 'in my mind', or 'in mind' where the mind is attributed the status of a location (a container), is a very common English expression. As we have seen, *men* in Dalabon is apparently not attributed the status of a location

In English an *idea* can be someone's personal thought or judgment. In that respect, English *idea* and Dalabon *men-no* convey comparable semantic values: we have seen that *men-no* can refer to one's thoughts. However, in Western culture,

idea may also refer to the idea of a representation in itself, free of any subjective ground. An idea doesn't have to be the idea of a particular person: it may be understood as a purely conceptual item. This is the way we have just used the term above: 'the idea of a representation'. This semantic value of *idea* draws from a long philosophical tradition, one of the most fecund examples being Plato's conception of 'ideas' as the essence of things (*The Republic* for instance).[14] In this sense, an *idea* is no longer subjective: it is a reified representation. The semantics of *men-no* does not include this distinction between subjective and reified representations. *Men-no* is eminently a personal attribute: it has to be attributed to someone. This is determined by the very form of the noun, which cannot appear without a possessive suffix,[15] and it is confirmed by my corpus where *men*-POSS does not appear without reference to a particular being to which it can be attributed. Thus *men-no* should be understood strictly as the attribute of a subjective entity.

These discrepancies are linked to the Dalabon understanding of the subjective and conceptual realms. It may be argued that Dalabon does not allow speakers to reify subjective judgments as easily as English does (or possibly other European languages). This observation may be reflected in general attitudes held by speakers: it appears that there is little room for disincarnated arguments. When I lived in Weemol, south-western Arnhem Land, it was common to discuss local politics with community members. I remember once trying to discuss with a Dalabon Elder why it was that, in the context of a particular argument, I believed that a man whom she disliked and deemed bad for her community could actually be in the right against somebody else whom she considered to be a good person. My intent was a failure, as the argument we were discussing could not easily be abstracted from the 'bad' person that had issued it. It seemed that, for her, ideas were less likely to stand by themselves outside of a particular utterance associated with a person. Rather, thoughts were considered subjective by essence. There was less room for representations freed from their subjective matrix. Western philosophy, on the other hand, has widely relied on that very idea of abstract conceptual representations, which also seems to be quite natural and accessible to

English speakers. The semantic features of *kodj-no* also entail important nuances as compared to the English 'head'. We have seen that this personal attribute was conceived of by Dalabon speakers as essentially physical. But at the same time, the same morpheme seems to connote the self as a social co-ordinate. This association does not reproduce the mind (conceptual)/body (physical) dualism, which is one of the cornerstones of Western philosophy and which, it may be argued, is often present in ordinary speech, as well.

Reaching such conclusions, it is tempting to conclude that, in general, Dalabon speakers do not practice reification in the conceptual domain. However, I believe this is a false assumption. A number of Dalabon nouns identify reified conceptual entities: *walu-no*, close to the English 'rule' and *dakkayh-no*, close to the Kriol *mining* (<Eng. 'meaning') are good examples. The first term, *walu-no*, refers to the realm of 'laws', including traditional laws that rule life, rituals etc., but also to the laws that rule the world in general, 'ontological' laws, if we may provisionally call them so. The second term, *dakkayh-no*, refers to the correctness of sense expressed in language. Examples 17 and 18 present utterances using *walu-no* and *dakkayh-no*.

(17) **Walu-no**   laik   yuno,   kah-yunginj
     traditional.law like   interj. 3sg/3sg-layPAST

     laik   *olot na deya*.
     like   every.single.thing
     'The **traditional law**, like you know, it laid every single thing in place.'

(18) *Kirdikird*   *ngah-yinmiwon* *bah*   *mak*
     woman   1sg-tellPAST   but   neg.

     dakkayh-no
     correct.meaning

     kah-bengkan.
     3sg/3sg-knowPR

     'I talked to that lady but she didn't get the **meaning** [of what I was saying].'

Both *walu-no* and *dakkayh-no* were laid down by Ancestral Beings, and stand fully apart from subjectivity. It is interesting to note that they usually come with the suffix *-no*, as well (see Ponsonnet et al. in preparation).

As we have seen, Dalabon speakers spontaneously translate *men-no* with the Kriol words *aidiya* and *main*. Because of the formal resemblance of Kriol words to English words, their translations are often mistakenly construed on the model of English roots. Since my field research focused on Dalabon rather than Kriol, I am unable to provide a full account of the semantics of these Kriol words at this stage. The fact that most of my interviewees were older speakers of Kriol with little mastery of English has also influenced my data. Younger speakers, who speak better English and less Dalabon, seem to use these expressions in a way that matches English semantics more closely. In this last section I therefore only make a few points to support the hypothesis that *main* and *aidiya* reflect some semantic features of *men-no* rather that the features of their English roots.

In Example 19, the speaker was explaining *men-nan* ('see someone's thoughts').

(19) *Laik ai*   *kin*   *luk*   *wad im*   *dinkin*,
     like 1sg   can   see   what 3sg   thinkPR

     luk   *im*
     see   3sgPOSS

     ***main**,*   *wad im*   *dinkin*.
     main   what 3sg   thinkPR.
     'Like, I can see what he thinks, see his **main**, what he thinks.'

Here *main* is 'what he thinks', his subjective judgments. It is equated to the thoughts themselves, that is, what in English we would call 'ideas'. Thus in Kriol, 'thoughts' translates as *main* in that circumstance. After being shown the picture of the human and kangaroo heads (Figure 1), another speaker said:

(20) *[…] Yeah,*   *yu*   *got*   *yu*   ***main**,*
     […] Yeah,   2sg   havePR   2sgPOSS   **main**
     wad   *yu*   *jingabat,*
     what   2sg   thinkPR

     ***aidiya**.*   *Fo yu*   ***aidiya**.*
     aidiya   2sgPOSS   **aidiya**

     'Yeah, you have your **main**…You know, what you're thinking of. Your **aidiya**.'

In Example 20, the speaker seems to consider *main* and *aidiya* synonymous. *Men-mungu*, which was spontaneously analyzed as 'without *men*' (see

Example 8 above), was also, on the same occasion, translated as *no aidiya*.

Thus, for the speakers who took part in the field sessions, *aidiya* and *main* may not be as clearly differentiated as *mind* and *idea* are in English. Rather, when used to translate *men*, they might as well be interchangeable for some speakers. This shows that Kriol is not aligned with English, but rather with Dalabon, as *main* and *aidiya* both translate the same word *men-no*, and may cover a comparable semantic value as *men-no*, as shown in Table 1.[16]

Further research focused on Kriol is necessary to assess how accurately *main* and *aidiya* actually reflect the semantic features identified for *men-no*. This will probably vary from speaker to speaker. At this stage, we can conclude that Kriol, despite the fact that it *resembles* English formally, does not seem to be that close to English semantically. It is important to emphasise this point, as resemblances between English and Kriol are often assumed in the course of daily interactions, and this may lead to subtle but deep misunderstandings. Of course, an in-depth study of the speech of a broader, and younger, sample of Kriol speakers would be necessary to make a stronger case in this respect.

Conclusion

In the proposed cultural/linguistic system (which I by no means take to be unified), subjectivity seems to be understood as a domain that remains rooted in the person. It is not easily 'reified' in order to shape a realm of objective concepts, understood in continuity with subjective views. Dalabon semantics describe the realm of objec-

tive concepts as a separate sphere that does not stand in continuity with subjectivity. On the other hand, the physical organs viewed as the locus of mental processes that make up the subject are the physical brain and the head. The head is described as the location of thoughts, while the brain seems to be considered a processor. And the morpheme *kodj*, while denoting a physical attribute, is also involved in the description of the individual as a person (the self) as an actor in the social realm.

Neither the fully fledged notion of subjectivity described above, nor the association of subjective identity with physical attributes of the person, match English patterns, where the realm of conceptual subjectivity is continuous to the realm of conceptual objectivity,[17] but rather seems segregated from the physical individual (this being in line with a broader mind/body dualism). These semantic features of Dalabon have important anthropological and philosophical consequences bearing on the conception of the person and of its fundamental epistemic relationships to his or her environment.[18] It seems that some of these specificities of Dalabon may be transferred in Kriol, where lexical items involved in the translation of *men-no* resemble English items formally, but could actually resemble the semantics of Dalabon items, at least for some speakers.

NOTES

1. Evans and Wilkins (2000) have also written on related issues.
2. This short methodological manifest connects with a long tradition. Among other authors, one can refer in particular to Evans and Sasse (2007), Lucy (1992), Quine (1960:Ch. II, 'Translation and Meaning'), Silverstein (2004) and Whorf (1956). I

Table 1: Summary of semantic alignments

	Personal apparatus, part of the person	Subjective views, judgments	Representation (potentially independent. of subject. reified)
English	Mind	Idea	
Dalabon speakers	*Men-no*		Cf. *walu-no*, *dakkayh-no*, not subjective
Older Kriol/Dalabon speakers	*Main/Aidiya*		Cf. *nalidj*, *memri*, global

laid some grounds for this approach in my doctoral and DEA theses (Ponsonnet 2002, 2005), using Wittgenstein's conceptual framework (Wittgenstein 1953).

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4. See Cutfield (in preparation) for details of Dalabon grammar, Evans et al. (2001, 2004) and Evans and Merlan (2001, 2003).

5. Abbreviations used in glosses:
[pers.x]/[pers.y]: x is agent and y is object
BENEF: benefactive case
COM: comitative case
du: dual pronoun
ERG: ergative case
excl: exclusive pronoun
FUT: future tense
higher: object is classified as a higher being than agent
incl: inclusive pronoun
INST: instrumental case
interj.: interjection
IRR: irrealis mood (if Ø, then the mood is realis)
LOC: locative case
neg.: negation
-no: nominal suffix with a variety of functions
O: object pronoun
PAST: past tense
pl: plural pronoun
POSS: possessive case
PR: present tense
PRIV: privative case
REDUP: reduplication
sg: singular pronoun
SUBORD: item is function of subordinate clause (if Ø item is function of main clause)

6. It is likely that this expression can be built in the same way for any person, but it has only been strictly confirmed for first and third person singular at this stage.

7. For instance, one may say *ngah-bengkan walu-no* ('I know the law'), or alternatively *ngah-walu-bengkan*. In the second occurrence, the noun walu has been incorporated. Its function in the clause has not changed (cf. Evans 1997, Cutfield in preparation).

8. See Dixon (2002:Ch. VI 'Verbs', §6.3 'Simple and complex verbs') and Evans (1997) for technical insights.

9. The problem of identifying whether *men* is understood as an object or whether the form *men-nan* is globally lexicalised recurs here, but thanks to the speaker's interpretation, it becomes somewhat idle.

10. *Kodj-no* also means 'melody', or rather 'prosody' it seems, but while these extensions are certainly important, I have not yet explored them in detail. This will be the topic of further research.

11. 'Head', either of human being or of other animals, can also be called *bamburidj-no*. *Bamburidj* wasn't found within any compound expression. The range of this lexical item has not been extensively documented yet.

12. 'Grey-stuff' is a more common term, but the speaker did say *meninx*.

13. One could argue that the speaker understands that God and the missionaries have actually cured a physical sore or wound in someone's head. But this interpretation is not very charitable, and the reference to the spirit 'cleaning up' people goes against it, by giving a spiritual tone to the sentence.

14. For a full account it would be necessary to go back to Greek here, but as it stands the reference to Plato provides a sufficient example of the uses that can be made in English of 'idea' as 'non-subjective representation'.

15. Some Dalabon nouns, such as *walu-no* and *dakkayh-no* further in the paper, can occur with a lexicalised -*no*: the suffix loses its value as a possessive suffix. For a detailed account of the miscellaneous uses of the uses and forms of the suffix -*no*, see Cutfield (in preparation). In *men-no*, like with body part nouns, -*no* is not lexicalised and does express possession.

16. Evans (2007) suggests that another morpheme, *beng*, is 'the most important lexical root used in expressions referring to the cognitive domain', and that 'this translates, rather precisely, as the English word 'mind''. While beng is definitely an important root in this domain, I believe that, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this article, the second formulation is misguiding, and that *beng* should not be equated to the English *mind*.

17. One is supposed to reach objectivity by the means of subjectivity (cf. Williams 1996 for instance).

18. Developing these philosophical perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper, but one can refer — among many other writings — to Austin (1961), McDowell (1994), Quine (1960:Ch. II, 'Translation and Meaning'), Sellars (1997), Williams (1996) and Wittgenstein (1953, 1969).

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Maïa Ponsonnet is French and was trained in philosophy in the University of Paris-8-Saint-Denis. Between 1998 and 2003 she lived and worked for most of each year near Weemol in south-western Arnhem Land (Bulman area), where she learned Dalabon and Kriol languages and gained some anthropological understanding of the local culture. In 2005 she completed a Doctorate in Philosophy. Her thesis (Comparing language games — Ways of seeing the world of Dalabon Aborigines of Northern Australia) stands at the crossroads of philosophy and anthropology. Since 2005 she has been working with the Dalabon speakers community on 'Semantics of reason and mind in Dalabon and Kriol' thanks to an AIATSIS grant. Using the data she gathers in the field, she is currently compiling a detailed Dalabon/Kriol/English glossary on the topics of law, reason, mind and emotions.

<maiaponsonnet@hotmail.com>