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## **Constraints on subject elision in northern Australian Kriol: Between discourse and syntax**

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## Abstract

Kriol is an English-lexified creole spoken throughout the northern regions of Australia since the beginning of the 20th century. With documentation and description of the language commencing only in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many aspects of Kriol grammar remain under-described, especially within the domains of syntax and pragmatics. This study documents and describes subject elision in Kriol, a process where subject NPs are elided in a range of syntactic and discourse contexts. Through qualitative methods we describe the environments wherein subjects are elided and consider the relationship between elision licensed by the syntactic context, and elision licensed by the discourse context. The analysis reveals that subject elision can be licensed through antecedent-anaphora relations at the level of syntax and through the encoding of unambiguous, continued topics following the beginning of a narrative episode at the level of discourse. We then consider the role of substrate and lexifier sources to account for how subject elision categories may have arisen in Kriol.

Keywords: Kriol, subject elision, discourse, syntax, contact languages

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Kriol is an English-lexified creole language spoken in the central northern regions of Australia. Claimed to have as many as 30,000 speakers, Kriol is the most widely spoken Australian Indigenous language, but despite this there is little grammatical description available (see Sandefur, 1979 and Schultze-Berndt, Meakins, & Angelo, 2013 for a general overview of the language). Kriol has been qualified as socially ‘invisible’ (Sellwood & Angelo, 2013), in the sense of having relatively low recognition and status. Indeed, very few mainstream Australians are aware of its existence, and claims that some Indigenous people ‘speak no language at all’, based on the assumption that they mix up English and their traditional language(s), remain very common. In this context, linguistic description is needed to combat perceptions of Kriol as a ‘broken’ or ‘bastardized’ form of English rather than an

independent and fully expressive language. In this article we investigate an aspect of Kriol that surfaces in the data across various regions and eras but has not been thoroughly examined and accounted for so far, namely subject elision.

Subject elision is a process in which a subject noun-phrase is deleted (elided) in particular contexts. In the literature, such elided materials are labelled null subjects or zero anaphora and the process is also described as pro-drop. We will avoid such labels, as these evoke formalist connotations about underlying syntactic mechanisms licensing the null expression of subjects, which we are not concerned about. Across languages, subject elision is widespread in contexts where the NP expression of the subject is dispensable because the identity of the subject referent can be otherwise retrieved. This is illustrated here for English, where the syntactic coordination between two clauses licences (and in fact favours), the elision of the subject of the second clause:

(1) He grabbed an apple and he ate it.

He grabbed an apple and  $\emptyset$  ate it.

Subject elision is not limited to these contexts where the subject can be identified by means of strict syntactic processes: rich inflectional morphology on verbs, for instance, can also foster subject elision, because it supports the identification of the subject antecedent. This is the case, for instance, amongst Romance languages such as Italian and Spanish (see Jaeggli, 1982; Rizzi, 1982; Montrul & Rodriguez-Louro, 2006). There is no such ground for the morphological licensing of subject elision in Kriol, as the language does not have extensive verbal morphology and lacks any kind of person and number inflection on the verb.

While subject elision is known to operate unambiguously on the basis of syntactic or morphological properties, it can also be regulated by discourse-pragmatic parameters, i.e. features of interaction and discourse such as topicality and cohesion. This is demonstrated for

Spanish by Montrul & Rodriguez Louro (2006: 404), as in (2) where the elided subject is a topic. Discourse-pragmatic subject elision is also marginally attested in languages such as English that are not typically considered to license subject elision through these processes (Nariyama, 2004; Oh, 2005; Scott, 2013).

(2) Pepe no vino hoy a trabajar Ø estará enfermo  
 Pepe no came today to work Ø will be sick

‘Pepe did not come to work today. He must be sick.’

### *1.2. Subject elision in Kriol*

To the best of our knowledge, subject elision is not discussed in any detail in the literature on Kriol. This is in spite of a number of attestations of the phenomenon in the data presented in several publications (see 5.1 for a discussion of these instances). Indeed, subject elision is a well attested phenomenon in our recent Kriol data from the Barunga region. In our discussion of subject elision, we will designate the symbol Ø to stand in for the elided linguistic material, but this is simply for convenience and does not imply the presence of an underlying ‘zero’ form. Unsurprisingly, Kriol licences subject elision in cases where the referent can be identified via antecedent-anaphor relations in coordination like in English.

(3) im-in<sub>i</sub> hold-um-bat im en im-in<sub>i</sub> hold-im na irruwul  
 3SG-PST hold-TR-CONT 3SG and 3SG-PST hold-TR LOC ear

Ø<sub>i</sub> old-um-bat im ebriweya  
 hold-TR-CONT 3SG everywhere

She was holding it and she held it to her ear, held it everywhere

Further, subject elision in Kriol is not limited to contexts that mirror the structure of its lexifier. As we show in the following pages, Kriol speakers also omit subjects in clauses where English would not license this, i.e. where the antecedent of the anaphoric elided subject does not occur in an immediately preceding, syntactically coordinated clause as in (4).

(4) MJ: im<sub>i</sub> didn gib-ap na im yet  
3SG did.NEG give-up LOC 3SG yet  
She didn't give up on her yet

[3 second pause]

QB: Ø<sub>i</sub> stil wail-bat la im  
still angry-CONT LOC 3SG  
She is still angry at her

(20140326a\_000\_MJ\_QB 107 [PS])

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<sup>1</sup> List of Abbreviations: 1SG- first-person singular, 1PL- first-person plural, 2SG- second-person singular, 2DU- second-person dual, 3DU- third-person dual, 3SG- third-person singular, 3PL- third-person plural, ADV- adverbial, CONJ- conjunction, CONT- continuative, COP- copular, DAT- dative, DEM- demonstrative, DET- determiner, DUR-durative, DIS- discourse marker, EXCL- exclusive, EMPH- emphatic, HABIT- habitual, INSTR- instrumental, INTJ- interjection, LOC- locative, NEG- negative, NMZR- nominalizer, OBLIG- obligation, POSS- possessive, PROG- progressive, PROX- proximal, PST- past, RECIP- reciprocal, REDUP- reduplication, REFLEX- reflexive, TOP- topic, TR- transitive.

<sup>2</sup> Coding labels detail the date of recording along with participant initials. Letters enclosed in square brackets indicate elicitation types; [PS] Photo scenes, [N] Narrative, [FPT] Family picture task, [SAD] Samson and Delilah, [EV] Emotion videos.

### ***1.3. Argument and organization***

On the basis of first-hand data collected in the region of Barunga, this article accounts for the phenomenon of subject elision in Kriol. We find that subject elision can be governed both syntactically and discourse-pragmatically. Syntactically, subject elision is found in clausal coordination and is licensed through antecedent identification. Discourse-pragmatic subject elision backgrounds referents in discourse and favours referents which are topical, unambiguous, and occur episode medially or finally. We note an expansion in the usage of discourse-pragmatic subject elision amongst younger speakers and we will also propose a preliminary discussion of the diachronic sources of subject elision in Kriol.

The article begins with a background and linguistic ecology of Kriol and an outline of the methodology for the study in section 2. Following this, section 3 describes the contexts in which Kriol licences subject elision, of which we distinguish four types<sup>3</sup>. Equipped with this typology, in Section 4 we turn to the discourse-pragmatic conditions that allow speakers to omit subjects without syntactic support. Section 5 will conclude with a consideration of the processes of diachronic language contact that have led to the emergence of the subject elision strategies described here. As suggested by Meyerhoff, (2000) in her discussion of elided subjects in Bislama, the creole language of Vanuatu, subject elision in Kriol also seems to result from a complex combination of influences from the lexifier, the substrates and universal trends.

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<sup>3</sup> The present study focuses on the suppression of referential, rather than expletive subjects. Expletive subject elision will be considered a separate phenomenon and will not be discussed here. We also excluded imperatives for comparable reasons. Kriol imperatives do variably exhibit subject elision, but this is cross-linguistically common and likely the result of a largely separate phenomenon from the one we deal with in this article.

## **2. Data and Methods**

### ***2.1. Language and linguistic ecology***

Presently, the spoken range of Kriol covers much of the central northern regions of Australia. This area stretches from the Kimberley region of Western Australia to the western edges of the Gulf of Carpentaria, with the exclusion of the coastal regions of the Top End. Kriol emerged from the creolisation of pidgin varieties spoken throughout northern Australia in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Harris, 1993). These pidgin varieties originated in New South Wales, before diffusing to the north with the expansion of the pastoral industry into Queensland, the Northern Territory and later, Western Australia. As a result, some Kriol features can be traced back to the Sydney language (Troy, 1994), and others may have been picked up along the way.

There is some regional variation in phonology, lexicon and grammar, which does not affect mutual intelligibility but is salient in speakers' metalinguistic awareness (Dickson & Durantin, 2019; Meakins, 2014). However, given that the status of Kriol varieties is not well understood, we will not use a specific regional label, but rather discuss Kriol in a general sense. The Kriol data presented in this article was collected in Barunga and surrounding communities to the East of the town of Katherine, in the Northern Territory. Other Australian languages spoken in this region prior to the shift to Kriol include four languages from the Gunwinyguan family; Dalabon, Rembarrnga, Jawoyn and Bininj Gun-Wok (Ponsonnet, 2018: 230). Kriol is now the daily language of interaction in Barunga and surrounding communities, although older speakers have varying degrees of knowledge and fluency in their heritage languages (Ponsonnet, 2010: 161).

### ***2.2. Methodology and corpora***

The discussion of subject elision presented in this article is based on the tokens found in a



corpus of 20 hours of spoken Kriol audio- and video-data from twenty Kriol speakers born between ~1930 and 2005. All these speakers are female apart from one young boy. When examining the data, we classified speakers into three generational groups; older speakers born between 1930-1960<sup>4</sup>, middle-aged speakers born between 1961-1980 and younger speakers born between 1981-2005. This classification groups both speakers of similar ages and speakers of similar linguistic backgrounds. Some of the older speakers do not speak Kriol as a first language but speak a language of the Gunwinyguan family natively (Ponsonnet, 2010). Middle-aged speakers generally speak Kriol as a first language but display different features from other speakers due to the expected generational changes. Younger speakers also speak Kriol as a native language but tend to display emergent features of Kriol that older speakers do not (Ponsonnet, 2016). Older speakers have contributed a larger proportion of the corpus than speakers of other generational groups.

The audio- and video-data was collected via a number of elicitation types: narratives told by speakers, comments on films and pictures, and metalinguistic discussions. The narratives are usually retellings of life events by speakers, with older speakers contributing more narratives than younger speakers. Speakers commented on two films: *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Noyce, 2002) and *Samson and Delilah* (Thornton, 2009), in sessions involving a group of speakers watching the films and providing commentary throughout. Finally, the images used for elicitation are mostly composed of connected scenes which tell a visual story. Speakers would provide commentary on these images and make a story by relating the scenes together. Speakers also provided similar commentary on a series of short videos which featured two characters in a sequence of different interactions. The elicitation methods

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<sup>4</sup> The exact date of birth for older speakers is not always known so in some instances age is only approximate.

presented here were not designed specifically for the elicitation of subject elision – such specialized elicitation is a matter for future research.

Our description of subject elision and its environments in Kriol is based upon 120 tokens which were extracted manually from the corpus (see section 3). For our discussion of discourse-pragmatic subject elision constraints in Kriol (see section 4), elided subjects were compared to a randomized sample of 90 overt subjects, selected by extracting overt subjects from the corpus and tagging each with a number. A random number generator was then used to select the overt subject tokens from this pool. These randomized overt subjects were then compared to the 55 discourse based subject elisions to determine discourse level constraints on their realization.

### **3. Anaphoric modes of subject elision in Kriol**

Our 20-hour corpus, which is composed of 15,000 clauses<sup>5</sup> contains a total of 120 instances of subject elision, which we extracted and categorized according to how they relate to their anaphoric antecedent and the context in which they operationalised (see table 1).

[table one near here]

Broadly, we can observe a distinction between syntactically and pragmatically motivated subject elision. For those of the syntactic type, among which we will distinguish ‘standard’ and to a lesser extent, ‘extended’, we find that cross-reference in coordination is the primary motivator of the observed elision, which conforms to wider typological trends (see section 3.1. and 3.2.). In our consideration of syntactically licensed subject elision, we only consider

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<sup>5</sup> The designation of clause number is approximate and is extrapolated from a manual clause count of a representative subset of the corpus.

cases of coordination and leave aside the question of the presence of subject elision in various subordinating constructions. Broadly, subordination in Kriol is typically marked by the subordinating morpheme *we/weya* and a resumptive pronominal, and so it is easily distinguished from coordination and juxtaposition (Schultze-Berndt et al., 2013). Those of the discourse type, including ‘distant’ and ‘co-constructed’ elision, are distinguished in the first instance as cases where the antecedent of the elided subject is separated by either an intervening clause or a pause of 3 seconds or longer. Australian Aboriginal narrative and conversation has been noted to feature long silences (Eades, 2007; Gardner & Mushin, 2015; Mushin & Gardner, 2009), where these silences are not symptomatic of interactional problems and may constitute a particular interactional style utilized by Aboriginal Australians. Following Mushin and Gardner (2009), we consider pauses of between 1 and 3 seconds more typical of this ‘continuous’ style of interaction, and thus allowing for syntactic coordination (see section 3.2.); while pauses beyond this length are taken as indicative of floor changes and utterance completion, and therefore disallowing coordination (see section 3.3.). In table 1 elision of the extended-coordination type is marked as being motivated by both syntax and discourse. This, along with the broken lines in the table, reflects that these cases of subject elision are intermediary between the syntactic ‘standard coordination’ type and the discourse ‘distant anaphora’ type. This is relevant for our discussion of the relative roles of lexifier and substrate sources for subject elision below (see section 5.3). In the case of co-constructed subject elision, this category is distinguished as speakers utilising an elided subject and relying on the overt subject reference of another speaker in the interaction. This variety of subject elision is largely governed by Aboriginal ways of co-constructing discourse, and the propensity of Aboriginal people to collaboratively construct discourse and therefore build off one another’s speech in the progression of discourse (Hill, 2018; McGregor, 1988, 2004, p. 271; Walsh, 2016) (see section 3.4.). Furthermore, we find that

those discourse motivated subject elisions also display sensitivities to a number of discourse-level features such as topicality, referential ambiguity and event structure. These issues are discussed in detail in section 4.1.

### ***3.1. Standard coordination***

The most frequent context for subject elision in Kriol, accounting for 50 tokens (41%), is in coordinated clauses, where the subject of the second clause is omitted, and the antecedent of the elided subject is the subject of the first clause. This coordination strategy, i.e. the conjunction of at least two clauses with an optional conjunctive morpheme, is a relatively common syntactic construction in Kriol (Nicholls, 2009: 89) and is cross-linguistically prevalent (Mauri, 2008). Because Kriol allows coordination in the absence of an overt conjunctive morpheme in a minority of cases, we must turn to further diagnostics to indicate that juxtaposed clauses are indeed in a coordination relation. We use primarily prosodic cues as a diagnostic of coordination in the absence of a conjunction<sup>6</sup>. In juxtaposed clauses, both clauses have a consistent plateau contour and there is no noticeable intonational reset between them. Elided subjects found in these coordination constructions are realized through purely syntactic means, where the anaphor (the elided subject) is interpreted by its dependency on some non-local (occurring in a distinct clause) noun-phrase or pronominal antecedent. Below, ((5) demonstrates this antecedent-anaphor relation between an elided subject and a pronominal antecedent in Kriol.

(5) tubala<sub>i</sub> toktok-bat                      tu    la    im

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<sup>6</sup> We also use the absence of preverbal tense-aspect-mood marking on the second clause as suggestive of coordination, as coordinated clauses with *en* typically feature these categories only on the first clause.

3DU talk:REDUP-CONT too LOC 3SG

en Ø<sub>i</sub> smailsmail-bat hapi-wei  
and smile:REDUP-CONT happy-ADV

These two are also talking to her and smiling happily.

(20140327c\_000\_LB 47 [PS])

In ((5) the subject of the second clause in the coordinate construction is elided, which is co-indexed by the antecedent *tubala* in the previous clause. Elided subjects occurring in this coordinate environment then reflect the phenomenon of anaphora where the elided subject is interpretable through the presence of the antecedent in the first clause (*tubala*).

The coordinated clauses in (5) are linked by a conjunctive morpheme, *en* (< Eng. ‘and’), but subject elision also occurs in the same position in coordinate constructions which lack a conjunction (juxtaposition). As illustrated in (6), the presence or absence of a conjunction in coordination does not appear to affect the realisation of subject elision.

(6) en ol mai kids<sub>i</sub> yustu go deya na la im  
and all my kids HABIT.PST go DEM EMPH LOC 3SG

Ø<sub>i</sub> sidan oldei pley-eran deya Ø<sub>i</sub> ran-eran his tent  
sit/stay all.day play-around DEM run-around his tent

All of my kids used to go to him there and they would stay there all day playing and running around his tent.

(20140327c\_007\_LB\_ND 011 [N])

### **3.2. Extended coordination**

As discussed above, Kriol subject elision most often occurs in the context of clausal coordination, which can be realized with or without a conjunction linking the two clauses. In

the cases referred to above as standard coordination, the second clause containing subject elision immediately follows the first, and forms part of the same intonation phrase. In addition, subject elision also occurs where the apparently coordinated clauses are prosodically disjointed, with a significant pause and an intonation reset between the two. Extended coordination represents an intermediary category between subject elision in syntax and in discourse, where the actual status of the clauses as syntactically coordinated is not always clear. Therefore, the label ‘extended coordination’ should not be taken as a designation of the syntactic relationship obtaining between clauses in these cases, but rather as a label which reflects the intermediate nature of this category. A pause between clauses of at least one and up to three seconds was chosen as the point of demarcation between standard and extended coordination. The one-second pause demarcation is of course partly arbitrary but aims to account for the fact that in a stream of connected speech a pause of this length or longer is impressionistically significant. Pauses of this length are also a noted feature of Aboriginal discourse (Mushin & Gardner, 2009; Walsh, 2016). We counted 15 so-defined extended subject elisions (13%), i.e. 15 cases where the pause between the clauses was 1 second or more (in addition to the 50 cases of elision in ‘standard’ coordination, defined by a pause shorter than 1 second, accounted for in 3.1). Subject elision in extended coordination is demonstrated in (7). The 1.5 second pause between the first clause and the following two is preceded by a falling contour with *blakbala*, corresponding to the end of a plateau contour; followed by reset with the first occurrence of the verb *shombat*, which begins the second clause. Intonational cues such as these further reinforce the dissociation between clauses, but, as the examples demonstrate, do not prevent subject elision. Extended coordination represents a departure from standard coordination strategies akin to those found in English, where coordination with subject elision tends to be relatively strict and is less accommodating of interruptions between coordinated elements (although it may feature

marginally in casual registers, (see Haegeman, 2013; Nariyama, 2004; Oh, 2005; Scott, 2013)).

(7) yowei im brabli bin gud-bala blak-bala brabli blak-bala<sub>i</sub>  
yes 3SG really PAST good-NMZR black-NMZR really black-NMZR

[1.5 second pause]

Ø<sub>i</sub> shom-bat mi au dei kuk-um keingguru,  
show-CONT 1SG how 3PL cook-TR kangaroo

Ø<sub>i</sub> shom-bat mi au dei kuk-um imyu  
show-CONT 1SG how 3PL cook-TR emu

A good Aboriginal man, a proper Aboriginal man. [1.5 second pause] He showed me how to cook kangaroo, he showed me how to cook emu.

(20140325a\_000\_QB 267 [N])

Example (7) comes from a narrative, but subject elision in extended coordination occurs in the data mostly in the context of discussing visual stimuli such as films and pictures<sup>7</sup>. Example (8) illustrates extended coordination in the context of visual stimuli, where the speaker is describing an image.

(8) yinbala<sub>i</sub> luk hapi deya, [2.5 second pause] Ø<sub>i</sub> smail-ing tu  
2DU look happy there smile-CONT too

You two look happy there [2.5 second pause] you two are smiling too.

(20140327b\_000\_KBM\_ABM 026 [PS])

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<sup>7</sup> Although this could partly be the product of the corpus, which favours these sorts of stimuli-based sessions.

The coordinate construction in (8) displays a two-and-a-half second pause between the clauses, along with an intonation reset at the beginning of the second clause. Although the referent of the elided subject can be identified through the relation to the antecedent *yinbala*, the pause of 2.5 seconds impressionistically loosens the bound between the antecedent and the anaphor, compared to the cases of standard coordination presented above.

Although, we have characterized subject elision in ‘extended coordination’ as partly motivated by syntax, the syntactic status of these cases is not always apparent from the data, and perhaps they may best be grouped with the cases of elision in ‘distant anaphora’ in some cases. Yet, considering extended coordination as a distinct type of subject elision points to intermediate cases between cross-linguistically standard subject elision underpinned by syntactic principles, and looser anaphoric mechanisms operating across independent clauses, as discussed in sections 3.3. and 3.4. Conceptualising extended coordination as an intermediate case may also be enlightening when we explore how subject elision developed in Kriol (see section 5).

### ***3.3. Distant anaphora***

In addition to subject elision licenced through syntactic relations in coordination we also encounter cases where the antecedent occurs in a distant syntactic domain (beyond adjacent clauses), in which coordination is unlikely to apply. We label these cases as ‘distant’ anaphora and define this notion of ‘distant’ as any context in which the antecedent of the elided subject occurs outside of coordination, i.e. syntactically governed antecedent-anaphora relations. Distant anaphora is the most apparent when there are intervening clauses between the antecedent and the elided subject, as the possibility of coordination is low in such contexts. In addition, we can treat as distant anaphora the cases where the clause with the



antecedent and that with the elided subject follow each other, albeit with a pause of at least three seconds. We take such long pauses to perceptually cue the completion of a spoken turn and also indicate a floor change in some contexts, so that coordination is usually no longer a plausible interpretation (unlike the cases of extended coordination above)<sup>8</sup>. This reflects the fact that a pause of this length is uncommon in spontaneous speech and is therefore less likely to represent a momentary gap or hesitation (Campione & Véronis, 2002). Additionally, pauses of this length are infrequent in the ‘continuous’ style of Aboriginal interaction and therefore are unlikely to constitute an intra-turn pause (Mushin & Gardner, 2009). Ultimately, this reliance on pause duration is heuristic, as other prosodic information would undoubtedly contribute to signalling the close of a turn. Altogether, these cases of ‘distant’ anaphora total 34 tokens (28%).

There is a great deal of variation within the data in how far the antecedent and the elided subject can be separated in discourse. Most cases exhibit only a single clause separating the antecedent and anaphor, or a pause of a few seconds. Occasionally, an elided subject is separated from its antecedent by both intervening clauses and pauses. Example (9) presents a prototypical case of distant anaphora, and (10) below an instance of a more significant separation.

(9) JJA: dubala<sub>i</sub> bin laflaf                      gija  
           3DU    PST laugh:REDUP    RECIP  
           These two were laughing with each other

MP: dei<sub>i</sub> bin ded-laf  
       3PL PST dead-laugh  
       They were really laughing

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<sup>8</sup> Although there are borderline cases where both interpretations would be acceptable.

[3 second pause, with laughing]

JJA: Ø<sub>i</sub> hepi

happy

They are/were happy

(20140408b\_003\_JJA\_MJo 103 [PS])

In (9) the speaker is discussing a photo which features two people laughing. The antecedents (*tubala, dei*) of the elided subject, in this instance, *dei* (< English ‘they’) are located in the previous clauses (one of which is provided by an intervening speaker, see section 3.4 below), but are crucially interrupted with a significant pause of 3 seconds. The fact that the speaker is discussing referents which are visually available allows for referential continuity and little ambiguity. The referential continuity and visual availability of referents likely favours subject elision. Accordingly, in our corpus distant anaphora also occurs less often in narrative contexts and is more frequent where speakers are discussing a visual stimulus, as in the example given above. Nevertheless, distant anaphora is not entirely absent from narratives, as reflected in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**, where the speaker is recounting a story from her youth, detailing the kinds of activities that occupied her time. The antecedent is located in the previous clause, but there is a pause of 4.5 seconds between the two clauses. In the second clause there is also an instance of subject elision in coordination (see section 3.1 for a discussion of subject elision in coordination).

(10) mela<sub>i</sub> bin trabel-ing garra dat trakta raitbak la kemp  
1PL.EXCL PST travel-CONT INSTR DET tractor right.back LOC camp

[4.5 second pause, in which a child interjects briefly]

Ø<sub>i</sub> sidan na en Ø<sub>i</sub> klin-im-ap awuj

sit/stay EMPH and clean-TR-up house

We would travel on that tractor right back home. We would stay then and clean the house.

(20140409b\_002\_JJA\_PA 44 [N])

### ***3.4. Co-constructed anaphora***

Co-constructed anaphora operates in contexts where several speakers are describing a stimulus or telling a story together. In such contexts one speaker may refer to a referent using an overt pronoun or other NP and then another speaker will elaborate on this description, but instead elide the subject altogether. The overt reference introduced by the initial speaker is the antecedent of the anaphoric subject elision in the speech of the following speaker. As discussed at the beginning of this section, such ‘interruptions’ in the co-construction of discourse between speakers is encountered often in Aboriginal ways of speaking. This collaborative construction of discourse is thought to reflect the tight network that Aboriginal people traditionally (and often still do) live, interact and communicate in (McGregor, 1988; Walsh, 2016). This interactional phenomenon, which accounts for 21 tokens (18%), is illustrated in (11) where the speakers MJ and QB are describing a series of images that tell a visual story, and MJ is describing one such image when QB elaborates:

(11) MJ: dijan wan na laik im<sub>i</sub> tel-im-bat na-  
this one EMPH like 3SG tell-TR-CONT EMPH  
In this one it seems he is telling-

QB: Ø<sub>i</sub> tel-im-bat stori langa-  
tell-TR-CONT story LOC  
He’s telling a story to-

MJ: Ø<sub>i</sub> tel-im-bat na im waif en im kid  
tell-TR-CONT EMPH 3SG.POSS wife and 3SG kid  
He’s telling it to his wife and his child.

QB's comment lacks an overt subject and so does the following comment provided by MJ. QB has relied on the explicit subject '*im*' introduced by MJ in her initial comment as an antecedent, and in this sense QB is appropriating the antecedent from MJ's utterance in the co-constructed discourse<sup>9</sup>.

This variety of subject elision occurs almost exclusively when speakers are discussing visual stimuli, but this is most likely due to the fact that the descriptions of such stimuli are usually collaborative, whereas narratives in the corpus were often told by a single speaker. Elided subjects that occur in this co-constructed context further reinforces the idea that in Kriol there is a pragmatic dimension of subject elision couched in discourse and interaction in addition to syntactically motivated elision.

#### **4. Discourse-pragmatic constraints on the realisation of elided subjects**

Approximately half (46%) of the elided subjects in our corpus, i.e. 55 tokens, are not supported by syntactic anaphora, as their antecedent is either (too) distant, or appropriated from another speakers' overt reference in co-constructed discourse. Contrasting with cases of syntactically licensed elision, these types are motivated by discourse organization. The presence of discourse-based subject elision in Kriol is less immediately predictable than syntactic elision because it less clearly reflects the organization of the lexifier. We will now discuss elided subjects realized through discourse-pragmatic processes in more detail and compare them with a sample of 90 overt subjects randomly chosen from our corpus (see 2.2.),

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<sup>9</sup> MJ and QB are mother and daughter and likely co-construct discourse frequently, as they occupy a strong, familial communicative network.

to identify the constraints on the realisation of these elided forms.

[table 2 near here]

The analysis of discourse constraints on subject elision through this comparison of elided and overt subjects resulted in the identification of three conditions which must co-occur (see table 2). Namely, elided subjects must be topical; there should be no major ambiguity as to what their antecedent/referent is; and they should not occur in the first clause of a new narrative episode. Considered together, these conditions by and large explain the distribution of non-syntactic subject elision in our Kriol data, with the exception of a single overt subject in our randomised sample which satisfies the above criteria (see section 4.4.).

#### ***4.1. Topicality***

Topicality was found to be a constraining factor upon the realisation of elided subjects in discourse-pragmatic contexts, namely that the referent of the elided subject must be an established or continued topic in the discourse. This is a common aspect of subject elision in the discourse-pragmatic literature, which recognises the influence of both sentence topics and discourse topics on elision (Ariel, 1990; Givón, 1983; Hobbs, 1985; Krifka, 2008). Topicality has been treated in varying ways and with varying degrees of specificity in the literature, and there is not a single cohesive and explicit definition for the phenomenon. Therefore, we take a broad approach to the notion of topic and do not attempt to provide a categorical definition for it here. Instead, topicality was measured on the basis of whether the referent was the most prominent actor in the discourse (by being the most frequently referenced actor in the entire discourse), and if the referent was the most frequently referenced actor in the preceding clauses leading up to the clause containing the elided subject.

Close examination of discourse structure for our 55 non-syntactically licensed tokens revealed that every referent encoded by elided subjects outside of coordination constructions is topical (in the sense highlighted above). This is shown in (12), in which the speaker is describing a scene in the film *Samson and Delilah*, where Samson, one of the main characters, is walking along a road by himself, until he is met by another boy later on in the scene.

(12) *im*<sub>i</sub> wokwok-bat            dis lilboi    madi *im*<sub>i</sub> luk-eran    samding  
 3SG walk:REDUP-CONT this little.boy maybe 3SG look-around something

[10 seconds pass, with the movie playing]

oh    Ø<sub>i</sub> blok-im-bat        rod bla    dis lilboi  
 INTJ    block-TR-CONT road DAT this little.boy

He's walking around, this little boy, maybe he's looking for something. Oh, he's blocking the road for this other little boy.

(20140409a\_000\_TM\_LB 034 [SAD])

In the above instance, the elided subject is coreferential with the third person singular pronouns '*im*' used in the previous clause, which is then followed by a lengthy 10 second pause. The elided subject encodes the most prominent referent in the episode (Samson). As a main character, he has been well established earlier in the film, meaning he is a continued discourse topic.

Example (12) also illustrates that while all elided subjects must be topical, not all topical subjects must be elided. Both overt pronominal markers *im* of the first clause in (12) refer to Samson, although he has been established as a topic well before this utterance. Thus, topicality licences subject elision but does not impose it, otherwise all the pronouns referring

to Samson in (12) would have been elided. Indeed, amongst our randomized sample of 90 overt subjects, 62 are topical. In the following sections, we discuss the additional factors that blocked the elision of these 62 topical subjects.

#### 4.2. Ambiguity

Of the 62 overt topical subjects in our randomized sample, 45 encode subjects that would otherwise be referentially ambiguous if not overtly mentioned. Referential ambiguity occurs in contexts where there is more than one potential referent a referring expression could refer to. We do not claim here that the use of overt referring expressions such as pronouns resolve the relative ambiguity presented by competing referents- simply that elided subjects are not employed in such ambiguous situations. Our 55 tokens of non-syntactic subject elision all occur where ambiguity is non-existent or low. This indicates a general tendency for elided subjects to not appear in situations where there are multiple referents, speakers instead favouring overt referring expressions. A case of low ambiguity is presented in (13), where the speaker is describing a short video of a person holding a stuffed bear.

(13) ABM: na im rait im gede lil patner deya lil tedi-ber  
 EMPH 3SG right 3SG get little partner DEM little teddy-bear  
 It's right, she's got a little partner there, a little teddy bear.

MP: o matbi im-in<sub>i</sub> sodoba geim-in beibi-wan?  
 or maybe 3SG-PST sort.of pretend-TR baby-NMZR  
 or maybe she is sort of pretending it's a baby?

ABM: Ø<sub>i</sub> mait pleiplei beibibeibi  
 might play:REDUP baby:REDUP  
 she might be playing baby

The speaker is describing the action of someone holding a stuffed bear. In the video, the woman, who is an established topic in the preceding clauses above, is the only character performing the corresponding action encoded by the predicate. In fact, there is no other animate character in the video, and therefore there is virtually no risk of ambiguity.

Conversely, the sample of overt subjects included in the analysis illustrates how an overt form will be used to encode a referent in contexts of referential ambiguity. This is illustrated in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**, where the speaker is describing a photo in which two children are sitting and laughing together on one side of a blanket, while another child sits on the opposite side of the blanket, face turned away and holding herself with a dejected posture. The presence of three salient referents would likely cause ambiguity if an elided subject was to surface because they are all highly activated in the discourse, so, in the case of the bolded pronominal at the end of (14), it would be unclear whether the speaker is specifying one of the participants, or several if it were to be elided.

- (14)      dandei dat    sista-wan      bin gubak    darrei na  
              DEM    DET sister-NMZR PST go.back DEM    EMPH
- bratha-wan      en      imin      hapi imin      ged-ap im-in  
              brother-NMZR CONJ 3SG=PST happy 3SG=PST get-up 3SG=PST
- toktok          na          dat natha-wan    deya dat natha-wan  
              talk:REDUP EMPH DET other-NMZR DEM DET other-NMZR
- im-in      tan-eran      na      gib-it    bak na      tubala  
              3SG=PST turn-around EMPH give-TR back EMPH 3DU



**im-in**      salki ba    tubala  
3SG=PST    sad    DAT 3DU

There, the sister returned that way to the brother and he was happy, he got up and he talked with the other child there. That other one, she was turned around, facing away from those two. She was sad with them.

(20140328b\_000\_AA 081 [PS])

These examples suggest that Kriol subject elision is blocked by ambiguity: elision is dis-preferred when several referents, which are usually all discourse topics, may offer competing interpretation. It is only in contexts where there is low referential competition that subject elision can occur. However, since only 45 of the 62 topical overt subjects in our randomized sample occurred in ambiguous contexts, we are left with another 17 cases where elision did not occur in spite of the subject being topical and its referent being unambiguous. We will now move on to discuss a third condition of subject elision, related to episodic structure.

### ***4.3. Episodic Structure***

The 17 topical, non-ambiguous overt subjects in our randomized sample all occurred in episode-initial position (with the exception of one token which is discussed in section 4.4.)). Episodes can be understood as self-contained events that occur within a larger discourse. Episodic segments of discourse are related by location, time and coherence of action and theme under discussion (Ji, 2002). We find similar episodic properties in Australian languages (Hill, 2018, p. 319; Hoffmann, 2015; McGregor, 1987; Stirling, 2012, p. 172). In the case of films and other visual stimuli, episodic boundaries were naturally suggested through changes in scene and image. For narratives, episode boundaries were delineated in the analysis using the above criteria. None of our 55 non-syntactic subject elisions occurred

at the beginning of such episodes. This position is always filled by overt subject reference, and elided subjects occur episode-medially and finally. This reflects Sanford & Garrod's (1981) observation that highly explicit referencing strategies tend to be employed after an episode transition. The constraint of episodic structure is illustrated in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**, where the participant is describing an image from the *Family Problems Picture Task* (Carroll et al., 2009; San Roque et al., 2012).

[Figure One near here]

(15) MJ: im-in<sub>i</sub> jis labta wanim na Ø<sub>i</sub> rid-im-bat baibul  
 3SG-PST just OBLIG what EMPH read-TR-CONT bible  
  
 na Ø<sub>i</sub> stat thinke-bat dijei nanga top  
 EMPH start think-CONT this.way LOC top  
 He just had to whatsit... Read the bible and start thinking about heaven.

[10 second pause as image is changed to figure 1]

MJ: tudei **im** wok-eran  
 now 3SG walk-around  
 now he's walking around

QB: oh im-in kam-at na  
 INTJ 3SG-PST come-out EMPH  
 Oh, he came out then.

(20140326a\_001\_MJ\_QB 201 [FPT])

Example **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** was uttered in reference to a picture that occurs around the middle of the visual story built upon a series of pictures. The referent is already well-established as a continued topic (see Figure 1) and is also the only

entity present at this part of the story – as clear from the picture –, meaning there is low risk of ambiguity. However, the second and third utterances in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** by MJ and QB are the first utterance the speakers make in reference to this particular image, which represents the beginning of a new episode in the discourse – reflecting that there has been a shift in time, location and action. Because the speaker has introduced a new discourse episode, they have opted for a more explicit form of reference rather than an elided subject, even though the referent is not ambiguous and is a continued discourse topic.

This suggests an interaction that occurs between the three potential constraints in the licensing of discourse-pragmatic subject elision outlined here. A subject can be elided only to encode an unambiguous continued topic that occurs either episode medially or finally. The fulfilment of all these constraints is illustrated in the cases of subject elision presented above, where the clause occurs after the beginning of the discourse episode.

This consideration of episodic structure explains 16 of the 17 occurrences of overt topical, non-ambiguous subjects in our randomized sample. Thus, considered together, the constraints of continued topic, ambiguity, and episodic structure mostly allow us to predict where elision is blocked, at least in our random sample of 90 cases. The following section will consider the interactional dimension of subject elision and conclude that while subject elision is constrained by the identified discourse conditions, it is not predicted by them.

#### ***4.4. Function and interactional choice***

In Kriol, elided subjects appear to be a marked category, while overt subjects are the unmarked category. This is reflected by the fact that in 20 hours of Kriol narrative and conversation, only 120 instances of referential subject elision are recorded. The discourse-based constraints on subject elision highlighted in subsections 4.1. to 4.3. indicate that

functionally, non-syntactic subject elision appears to mark referent in narrative and discourse as well-established, expected, and therefore backgrounded as a continuing topical entity. This functional quality of subject elision is consistent with some functions of non-use of optional elements in grammar cross-linguistically (McGregor, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, the elision of a referential subject in the contexts outlined above is not categorical. Subject elision in Kriol is marked, and we should expect to encounter a range of pragmatic and interactional factors that may influence elision or the maintenance of overt subject reference; despite the necessary discourse conditions being met. A case of overt subject maintenance in a discourse context that allows elision from our sample of overt subjects is illustrated in (16), where the speaker is addressing two children and asking them to describe a picture of a woman holding her head in her hands. The speaker here may be using overt forms as an interactional choice to draw the attention of the children to the image (the subject NP in question is bolded).

- (16) dijan iya im thinki-bat adono wanim bla im thinki-bat  
 DEM here 3SG think-CONT CONJ what DAT 3SG think-CONT  
 wad yubala reken yu-luk im thinke-bat  
 what 2PL think 2PL-look 3SG think-CONT  
**im** hol-im mijelb hed layat yinbala tok garra Kriol  
 3SG hold-TR REFLEX head like.this 2DU talk INSTR kriol

This one here, she is thinking, I do not know what she's thinking about. What do you think? Look, what is she thinking? She is holding her head like this. You two talk in Kriol.

(20140325b\_000\_LB 003)

In such an interactional context as the one presented above, it is unsurprising that the speaker continued using overt subject reference despite the conditions for subject elision being met. The speaker is drawing the attention of two addressees to an image and making a request and in doing so may select overt reference to achieve this goal. Subject elision here would background the referent in the joint attentional domain, which is the opposite of the speaker's communicative goals.

Although we have identified three discourse conditions that constrain the elision of subjects outside of coordination, these conditions are not fully predictive, as interactional and pragmatic factors are also likely to have a key role in motivating the use or non-use of overt subject reference (McGregor, 2013).

## **5. Questions of variation and contact**

In this section we will briefly consider what linguistic influence may have led to the development of subject elision in Kriol, both at the level of creole genesis, and in terms of language change post-genesis, where we will observe that the use of subject elision seems more widespread amongst younger speakers. We hypothesize that elided subjects realized through syntactic processes were introduced to the language through the lexifier, while the emergence and present expansion of discourse-pragmatic subject elision in Kriol could be the result of pan-regional substrate influence.

### ***5.1. Scope of the phenomenon***

Subject elision is not specific to Kriol as spoken in the Barunga region. Although it has not been analysed in detail elsewhere, it is reported in passing, or simply apparent in data from other regions. For instance, Koch, (1991: 98) notes that in Aboriginal English varieties major constituents of a clause can be elided, and provides the example presented in(17), where the subject has been elided. This example comes from the 1979 Mudburra land claim,

and the Aboriginal English speaker is labelled as ‘witness’. This example is reminiscent of subject elision occurring in co-constructive contexts (see section 3.4) in Kriol from the Barunga region, and so there may be some correspondence in the discourse functions of subject elision between these varieties.

- (17) Counsel: He comes from down south way, does he- that rain?  
 Witness: Yes, Ø come from that way.

Subject elision is also reported in the contact variety labelled Wumpurrarni English, spoken in and around the town of Tennant Creek, Northern Territory (Disbray, 2009: 55).

- (18) Ø kuk-im-bat    Ø na  
           cook-TR-DUR    DIS  
  
 Ø taginat-bat tangkila na  
           eat-DUR    mussels DIS

[they] cooked [them] [they] ate those mussels.

Further reports are found in the Kriol variety spoken in Elliot, Northern Territory as in **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** (A. Hamilton-Hollaway, pers. comm.). The pattern of elision recorded here is again reminiscent of what we have characterized as elision in co-construction.

- (19) MSD: minya jindaba=ma    det    what he-si    do-ing    there  
           PROX another=TOP DET    what 3SG-COP do-PROG DEM  
           here is another one, that, what’s he doing there?

MWH: Ø<sub>i</sub> plak-im-bat    det kurrkabadi  
           pluck-TR-CONT DET bush.turkey  
           he’s plucking that bush turkey

MSD: Ø<sub>i</sub> plak-im-bat      det    nyambala karnanganja  
          pluck-TR-CONT DET    whatsit    emu  
          he's plucking that, what is it, emu

(AHA1-2017\_002-04)

## 5.2. *Generational Change*

Although the data used for this study is not tailored for variationist studies, the number of speakers who contributed data and their range in age allowed for some preliminary observations about generational variation. As will be discussed below, the increasing usage of discourse subject elision amongst young speakers suggests some expansion of usage, while a consistent, but low usage amongst older speakers suggests the feature is not necessarily a recent innovation, rather a feature which is expanding across generations.

The number of discourse subject elisions per 1000 clauses across speakers was derived from the ratio between subject elision and clause total for each speaker. The clause totals for each speaker are based on the proportion of linguistic material each speaker contributed to a randomised subset of the corpus combined with the estimated clause total of the corpus. Table 3 provides a broad comparison of how subject elision rates differ across the generational groupings discussed in 2.2.

[Table three near here]

. The younger speaker category displays a higher average rate of discourse-pragmatic subject elision than the other generational groups, with the speaker AA having the highest rate at 17 instances of discourse subject elision every 1000 clauses. As table 3 shows, the average rate for the older and middle-aged categories is much lower than the average of younger speakers. This reflects that while the speakers of older generational groups do use

subject elision, we observe an increase in usage by younger speakers in the data. This pattern is further exemplified in figure 2. The patterns in Table 3 do not suggest an age-based feature, but rather an increase in usage. While further research is needed to confirm this trend, this negative correlation between the age of speakers and their rate of subject elision suggests that the usage of discourse subject elision is expanding among Kriol speakers of the Barunga region<sup>10</sup>.

[Figure two near here]

In the following sections, we will now consider how we can account for both the presence of subject elision (syntactic and pragmatic) in Kriol, and for its apparent expansion in usage.

### ***5.3. Lexifier and Substrate Influences***

As we have already discussed, elided subjects commonly occur in English across a range of syntactic contexts including coordination constructions. Due to Kriol exhibiting the same profile of subject elision in coordination constructions as its lexifier, we posit that this feature of the language emerged during the creolisation process, based on superstrate influence – and supported by universal trends, given that this pattern of subject elision is common across the world’s languages (Wilder, 1997). Non-syntactic subject elision, on the other hand, is unlikely to have been inherited from English where it is restricted to particular pragmatic contexts, and favours first person reference, or second person reference in the context of

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<sup>10</sup> This perceived expansion may also be the result of registral variation, where subject elision is more common in informal registers. We do not have data suited to testing such a hypothesis, and so this question will be left for future research.



imperatives (Haegeman, 2013; Nariyama, 2004; Oh, 2005; Scott, 2013)<sup>11</sup>. Rather, we hypothesize that non-syntactic subject elision results from the combination of universal trends and the substrate influence of Australian languages. Indeed, discourse-based subject elision with comparable function as in Kriol, namely backgrounding a topical discourse entity, is found in many languages across different regions and linguistic families – for instance Italian (Frascarelli, 2007), German (Trutkowski, 2016), Swedish (Wide, 2014) and Japanese (Nariyama, 2003) along with Australian languages, such as Bardi (Pama-Nyungan) (Bower, 2008) and Umpila (Pama-Nyungan) (Hill, 2018: 260-1), so that substrate influence is a plausible reinforcing factor along with broader universal trends.

Substrate influence here refers to the input of languages used by the non-dominant speaker group. Siegel, (2007, 2012) proposes that substrate influence operates via a mechanism called ‘transfer’, where the grammatical system of the first languages of early creole speakers maps onto perceptually salient forms of the superstrate language to modify it and form the new creole. In the context of Australian Kriol, the substantial influence of a range of Australian languages has been demonstrated (Munro, 2004, 2011) and thus it is unsurprising that it may also apply for subject elision. In this case, we suggest that the superstrate feature that supported transfer was subject elision itself, in its syntactic occurrences. Given that a number of Australian languages feature discourse-based argument elision, it is plausible that English syntactic subject elision got reinterpreted as discourse-pragmatic subject elision (i.e. extended to such contexts), as a transfer from Australian substrates. Indeed, the intermediate status of our category of subject elision in ‘extended

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<sup>11</sup> Since it is difficult to find data on oral English at the time of early colonization, modern English is our best proxy.

coordination' may be a synchronic reflection of such a reinterpretation, thus 'bridging' syntactic elision and discourse-based elision.

The Gunwinyguan languages that are or used to be spoken in the Barunga region alongside Kriol are polysynthetic and have obligatory pronominal markers affixed to the verb (Evans, 2003). It is very difficult to determine whether these obligatory pronominal affixes refer to the arguments (like they do in French for instance) or whether they constitute pure agreement. But either way, since these pronominal forms are not optional, they cannot have inspired subject elision in Kriol. As for independent pronouns, Gunwinyguan languages only use them relatively sparingly for the purpose of emphasis, which is markedly different from the patterns observed in Kriol. Therefore, input from these languages is an unlikely source for the presence of non-syntactic subject elision in Kriol. Beyond the Barunga region, on the other hand, when surveying the languages within and adjacent to the regions where Kriol is spoken, we find subject elision to be a common feature cross-linguistically, which lends credence to the notion of pan-regional influence of Australian language features, where subject elision is a common feature of languages around the Kriol speaking region that many substrates have likely reinforced. The way these features may have arisen in Barunga specifically is through historical pidgin expansion routes, which followed the expansion of the pastoral industry (Meakins, 2014), or through the movement of Afghan cameleers, who had extended contact with Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory during the colonial period, and who also used a pidgin which featured pronominal elision (Simpson, 2000: 218). Indeed, the feature of pronominal elision appears to have a long history in Australian contact varieties, with reports noting its presence in several pidginized varieties of English in the early decades of colonial settlement (Mühlhäusler, 1998: 8; Simpson, 1996: 185). We will now review a sample of two languages spoken along the routes of pidgin

expansion, Garrwa and Warlpiri, in order to understand how subject elision in these varieties compare to the discourse-pragmatic subject elision observed in Kriol.

Swartz (1991) observes that zero anaphora in Warlpiri, a Pama-Nyungan language spoken in central Australia, is an unmarked reference tracking strategy in discourse that encodes thematic continuity. All overt anaphors are pragmatically marked, functioning as disambiguation or emphasis for instance. This is reminiscent of how elided subjects function in Kriol discourse as markers of topical continuity (see Section 4) (although in Kriol, elision remains marked, and overt expression unmarked). In Garrwa, a non-Pama-Nyungan language spoken around the Gulf of Carpentaria, elided verbal arguments are pragmatically unmarked in discourse, while explicit NPs serve various pragmatic functions. In her analysis of Garrwa word order, Mushin, (2005) contends that elided arguments in Garrwa signal referential continuity in discourse, with more explicit referring expressions only being used when participants in discourse are first introduced. This is similar to the function of discourse-pragmatic subject elision in Kriol (see Section 4). Garrwa and Warlpiri are both located along the historical expansion routes of the pidgins that formed the basis of Kriol, and as such are plausible candidates for substrate contributors to discourse-pragmatic subject elision in Kriol.

In addition, the contemporary presence of argument elision in the vicinity of the Barunga region, in which languages like Warlpiri are still actively spoken, may be channelling the current expansion of subject elision in Kriol, via pan-regional contact. There are several pathways through which contact between Kriol speakers from the Barunga region and other Australian languages such as those discussed above may have been sustained. As the result of ‘orbiting diasporas’ (Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2019: 73), regional centres such as Katherine may act as a hub for linguistic contact, innovation and change amongst languages that are not geographically contiguous. Linguistic contact fostered by interactions in the regional urban centre may be a vector for the diffusion of substrate features which have derived from a range

of geographically diverse Australian languages, in particular among younger generations, who tend to spend more time in town. Indeed, Kriol speakers interact with speakers of other Kriol varieties, and some speakers from Barunga are known to speak Indigenous languages such as Warlpiri in particular. While this suggestion cannot be conclusive at this stage, it points out to the need for further research around complex dynamics of contact in contemporary Aboriginal Australia.

Another way in which Australian languages may have influenced, and continue to influence, the development of discourse-pragmatic subject elision in Kriol may be that Kriol speakers share with speakers of other Australian languages a number of preferences in terms of discourse organization – hence not an effect of contact, but an areal feature driven by culturally shared styles of language use. Indeed, strategies for communication and managing discourse are not necessarily bound to individual languages (Ponsonnet, 2019) and previous researchers have noted the continuity of discourse practices from Australian languages into Kriol (Hoffmann, 2012: 184; Nicholls, 2009: 297). In the Barunga region, Gunwinyguan languages such as Bininj Gun-Wok feature indirect reference, where speakers often communicate in circumspective and indirect ways, and avoid using descriptive expressions for person reference (i.e. personal names), which reflects the communicative value of indirectness (Garde, 2008). Similarly, Eades, (1991) also notes the same preference for indirectness in the speech of Aboriginal English speakers. The above observations suggest that indirect styles of communication are common in the Barunga region, a feature which likely encouraged subject elision in Kriol, as phonologically reduced referring items are consequently less direct than descriptive NPs or personal names (Garde, 2008). It is plausible then that culturally embedded communication practices such as indirectness may have reinforced the use of subject elision in Kriol and contributed to its present expansion in discourse-pragmatic contexts once it had transferred from substrate sources.

In our review of possible sources for the synchronic pattern of subject elision in Kriol, a pattern of mutual reinforcement between substrate, lexifier and universal trends has emerged and remains the strongest explanation to account for the development of this feature in Kriol.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this article we have set out to provide an initial description of subject elision in Kriol, analyse how subject elision operates on the level of discourse, and provide some suggestions about what led to the emergence of this feature in Kriol and what has motivated the contemporary expansion of discourse-pragmatic subject elision. This description has shed light on what has previously been a relatively undescribed feature of Kriol and contributed to the growing scholarship relating to the description of Australian Kriol.

With respect to the behaviour of subject elision in Kriol, we have established that the feature operates on two distinct linguistic levels; the level of syntax, and the level of discourse-pragmatics. A qualitative analysis of the discourse conditions for subject elision found that it backgrounds topical discourse entities and is licensed when the participant in question is a continued, unambiguous topic that occurs either episode medially or finally. We have also observed that subject elision is used more frequently by younger speakers in our data, which suggests an expansion in the use of discourse-pragmatic subject elision.

Since subject elision is cross-linguistically common, its presence in Kriol may result in part from universal pressures. In addition, following the above analysis we elaborated some hypotheses concerning the role of contact regarding the occurrence of subject elision in Kriol. Syntactically constrained subject elision is likely to have featured in early Kriol as a result of direct influence from the English lexifier, imported through syntactic constructions such as coordination during the creolisation process. Subject elision operating at the discourse-pragmatics level, however, is likely to be the result of substrate transfer during

creolisation, where the discourse-pragmatic interpretation of subject elision transferred from a range of potential substrate sources not within the Barunga region, but beyond, along the many historical expansion routes of the pidgins that formed the basis of Kriol. Both of these mechanisms with respect to subject elision are attested cross-linguistically and were likely reinforced through broader universal tendencies. Furthermore, our data suggests increased usage of discourse-based subject elision amongst younger generations, and it is plausible that the influence of further-removed Australian languages continues into the present, as urban centres are likely loci for contact. In addition to influence by contact, the fact that Kriol speakers share some typically Australian preference for certain discourse practices, for instance indirectness in reference to individuals, may also have favoured the development of discourse-pragmatic subject elision, and perhaps its current expansion if applicable.

As we have demonstrated, subject elision in Kriol has a dynamic function in discourse, and subject elision is just one aspect of a larger dynamic system of referring expressions available to Kriol speakers. The research presented here is an intriguing preliminary step into the complexities of discourse in Kriol, how it is structured and how this system has responded to historical and contemporary linguistic contact.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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