

**From street to screen:
gauging the scope of English-lexified varieties in Aboriginal Australia**

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*Reviewing an emblematic marker:
nuances of gammon across contact varieties*

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Introduction

- **Initial observations**
- *Gammon* is frequent in media representations of Aboriginal English.
 - Bednarek's presentation.
- And is also frequent in Kriol (Northern Territory).
 - From our work for Schultze-Berndt, Ponsonnet & Angelo (in prep.).
- But it seems to be used in different ways in each context.
- Kriol *gemen* displays further grammaticalization, 'subjectification'.
- And is more modal than negative.

Introduction

- **Presentation**
- Historical attestations of *gammon*.
- *Gammon* in media representations of Aboriginal English.
- *Gemen* in Kriol.

Historical attestations

- ▶ Self-designation for Irish Travellers' secret language:
 - ▶ Gammon/Cant; Shelta (academic) (at least since late 1700s)
- ▶ 18th century criminal slang term *gammon*
 - ▶ 'deceit, pretence, not strictly true' (cf. Vaux 1812: 242-3)
- ▶ Attested in NSW pidgin in early 19th century
 - ▶ (Macquarie Dictionary, Troy 1990: 57)

Pidgin and creole attestations

- ▶ Cambridge anthropological expedition to Torres Straits:
 - ▶ Jargon: 'cheat, deceive, pretend, kidding' (Ray 1907: 253-3)
- ▶ Also in contemporary descriptions of Pacific creoles e.g. Tok Pisin (Mühlhäusler 1986: 45-46)
 - ▶ ie, nonsense; to lie deceive, pretend; be false, deceitful

Attestations of gammon in south-west Pacific (Baker 1993)

New Zealand 1814

New South Wales 1825

Queensland 1847

Vanuatu 1867

Papua New Guinea 1875

German New Guinea 1876

Solomon Islands 1884

Torres Strait 1888

Multiple contexts

- Aboriginal English
- Including in the media
- With emblematic dimensions.

Yufla gammon! English, blackfella way [Interview]

In D Browning, ABC Away, Transcript of Steven Oliver (9:40-16:09)

It's like gammon. Gammon is such a hard one to explain because we've got so many ways of using that. So we'll go "Oh that was a gammon song" which means the song wasn't very good. Or we go "Oh you're being gammon" that's like "Oh, you're telling lies". Or like, um, you know, "I'm only gammon" which means I'm only joking. So gammon is another one too where it's in how we use it in that context.



Source: NITV's 'Gammin News' segment on teen program 'Grounded'.

Source: Black comedy.
Summon-a-black-mum, Feb 26 2020 ABC
Darwin (Facebook] (0:48)
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2589666571358374>

SUMMON-A-BLACK-MUM



You're gammon ay?

Multiple contexts

- Aboriginal English (media)
- Kriol
- With relatively different uses in Aboriginal English and Kriol.

Usage in Aboriginal English (media)

- ▶ Versatile word class: adjective, verb, etc.
- ▶ Spectrum of fairly negative meanings.
 - ▶ Something (a thing, a person, speech content...) is:
 - ▶ fake, untrue, lie, pretend,
 - ▶ disagreeable, rubbish.
 - ▶ Also used for 'joking', 'kidding', which is less negative.
- ▶ Relatively close to the etymological English sense.
 - ▶ 'deceit, pretence, not strictly true'
- ▶ And to the sense reported for colloquial Australian English.

gammon /'gæmən/ (say 'gamuhn) *Colloquial*

adjective

1. **a.** not true. **b.** not real; fake.
2. disagreeable, unsatisfactory or inadequate: *that's a gammon idea.*

noun

3. **a.** a lie or fib; nonsense; rubbish. **b.** something which is not real or genuine; a fake.
4. something considered disagreeable, unsatisfactory or inadequate.

verb (i)

5. **a.** to tell fibs; lie: *I think he's gammoning.* **b.** to joke or pretend; have someone on; kid: *I'm just gammoning!*
6. (*construed as present participle*)
 - a.** lying; telling fibs: *I think he's gammon to us.* **b.** joking; kidding: *I'm just gammon with you!*

verb (t)

7. **a.** to lie to: *Don't gammon me.* **b.** to have (someone) on; joke with; kid: *I'm just gammoning you!*
8. (*construed as present participle*)
 - a.** lying to: *I think he's gammon us.* **b.** teasing; kidding: *I'm only gammon you!*

interjection

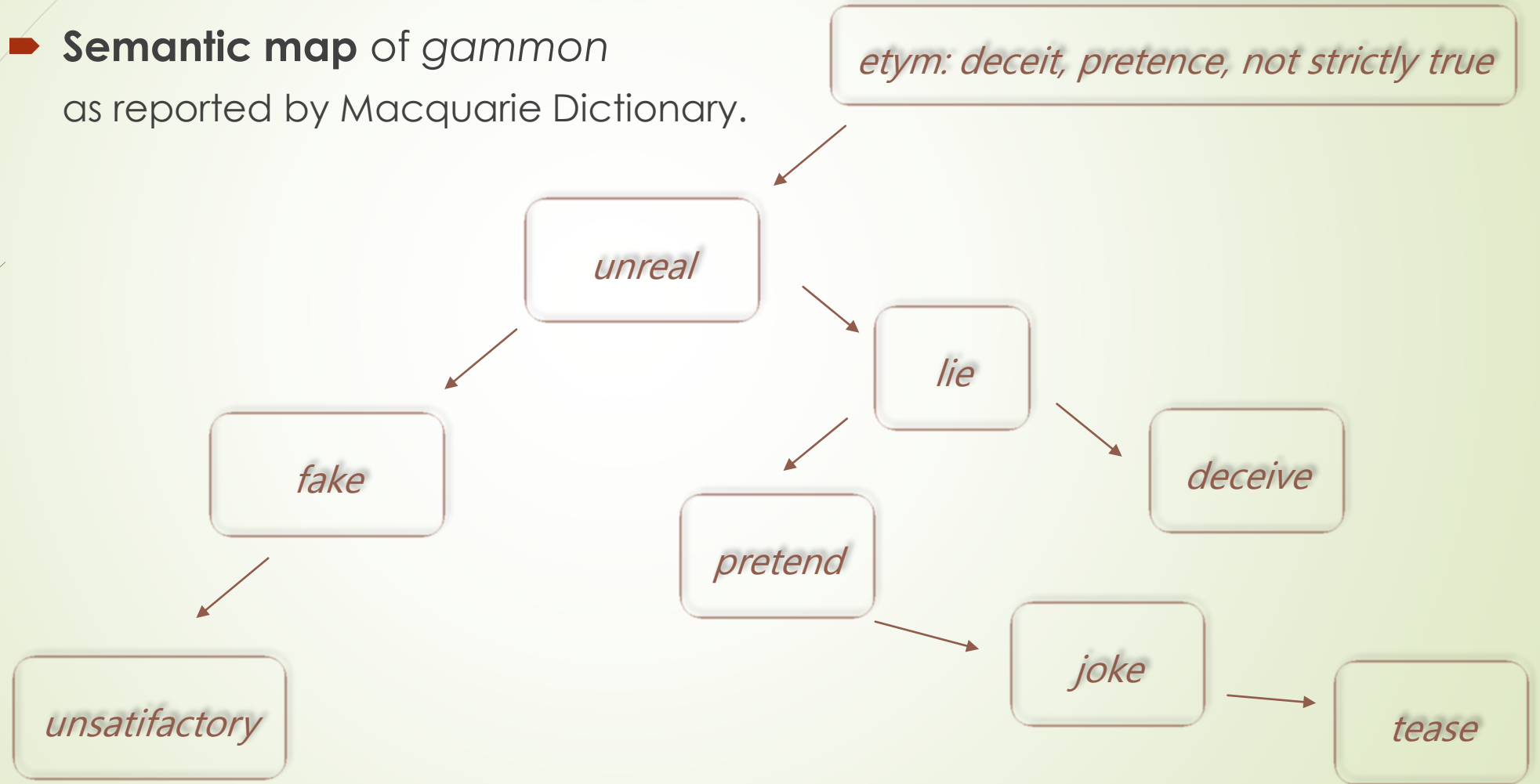
9. (an exclamation of disbelief or derision.)

phrase

10. **gammon around**, to fool around.

Usage in Aboriginal English (media)

- **Semantic map** of *gammon* as reported by Macquarie Dictionary.



Kriol attestations

- ▶ Well attested in our recent corpora:
- ▶ Barunga, Binjari, Westside
(Schultze-Berndt, Ponsonnet & Angelo in prep.)
- ▶ Epistemic/evidential modal particle in contemporary Kriol.

Kriol attestations

- ▶ Also earlier documentation at Bamyili (Barunga) and Ngukurr. (Sharpe 1975: 8 and Sandefur & Sandefur 1979)
- ▶ Hudson (1985: 8) notes its absence at Fitzroy Crossing.
- ▶ Not frequent in contemporary Kimberley varieties. (Stef Spronck, Connor Brown pers. com.)

Variants: gemen, geman, gemin, and giyaman
Also gammon following the English orthography.

Usage in Kriol

- **Word class and grammaticalization**
- *Gemen* is a particle.
- # Verbal or adjectival use 'fake, pretend, lie'.
- Only attested with older speakers, now deceased.
 - And not in all regions.
- Probably recent 'grammaticalization' from lexical to functional class.

Usage in Kriol

➤ **Semantics**

➤ Mostly three different meanings:

➤ 1. Imaginary scenarios

➤ 2. False beliefs

➤ 3. Hearsay, in particular remarkable (hard to believe) hearsay

➤ Sense 1 qualifies speech and thought contents.

➤ 'Subjectification' in senses 2 and 3.

➤ Which qualify participants' cognitive states.

Usage in Kriol

- **Sense 1: Imaginary scenarios**
- Qualifies some speech or thought content as imaginary.
- Often flags that the speaker is knowingly inventing material.
 - E.g. for the purpose of illustrating a point.
- # lie and deception
- Like 'say' in English.
- But can also be used in the context of dreams for instance.

Usage in Kriol

► Sense 1: Imaginary scenarios

- (1) *if mela guw en mela baiy-a bigwan wodamelen from Wulis geman na,*
 if 1PIEx go and 1PIEx buy-TR big-NOM watermelon from Woollies **ILL** TOP
wal dan-jeya yu kol-a 'bigwan'.
 well DEM-there 2Sg call-TR big-NOM

'Just say if we were to go and buy a big watermelon from Woollies (a supermarket), well that's what you call 'big'. (Binjari; Maureen Hodgson; 11, l.80)

Usage in Kriol

➤ Sense 1: Imaginary scenarios

- Speaker/author knows events are part participant's dream.
- *Gemen* indicates events to belong in the dream.

(2) *Imin ded silip eniwei la ola rok.*

3SgPst dead asleep anyway LOC PI rock

Imin drim gemen wan-bala frog bin singat-singat bla elb.

3SgPst dream ILL one-INDIV frog PST call-REDUP DAT help

Gemen jad frog imin tok, "Dig-im-at mi! Dig-im-at mi! Mi stak la rok."

ILL DET frog 3SgPst talk take-TR-out 1Sg take-TR-out 1Sg 1Sg stuck LOC rock

'He fell fast asleep on the rocks. He dreamt **that** a frog was calling out for help.

In his dream the frog said, "Get me out! Get me out! I'm stuck in the rocks."

(Galmur, J. & Willika, C. (1994) *Hanting Longwei*. Barunga: Barunga Press)

Usage in Kriol

➤ Sense 2: False beliefs

- Participant is/was at some point expecting something to happen.
- But the speaker at the time of utterance knows it is not the case.
- I.e. typical mistaken-belief construction (Spronck 2020).

(3) *Imin jis hepi ba luk im mami **gemin** bat najing.*

3SgPst just happy DAT see/look 3Sg mum **ILL** but NEG

‘She was so happy **believing** she would see her mum, but it didn’t happen.’

(Barunga region (Barunga), visual stimulus, 20140406a_004_MJ 025)

Usage in Kriol

► Sense 2: False beliefs

- Clause over which *gemen* scopes need not describe the false belief.
- Often expresses the attitude or actions of participant with misguided belief.

(4) *Imin gu-dan la krik gada thad bard, nomeda im ded,*
 3SgPst go-down Loc creek Com Det bird no.matter 3Sg dead
traí meig-i im – geman tjak-im dijei ba meigim im flai
 try make-Tr 3Sg **ILL** throw-Tr hither Dat make-Tr 3Sg fly
wen imin ded thad bard.
 when 3SgPstdead Det bird

‘He (a very young boy) went down to the creek with that bird, regardless of the fact that it was dead, and tried making it– was throwing it in this direction **with the mistaken idea** of making it fly when it was already dead, that bird was.’ (Binjari; Maureen Hodgson; MH17-9, 1.86)

Usage in Kriol

► Sense 3: Hearsay

- Standard hearsay situations.

(5) *Aftathad wan-bala boi bin luk, gemin.*
 after-DEM one-INDIV boy PST look ILL

"Ei!//Yumob!//Dijan woda im stil kaman."

Hey 2PI Dem water 3Sg still approach

'Then one young man saw (it) **apparently**.

"Hey! You lot! This water is still rising."

(Binjari; OR, Fladwada – 1, l.276)

Usage in Kriol

► Sense 3: Remarkable (hard to believe) hearsay

► Often, the speaker finds hearsay hard to believe or extraordinary.

► E.g. unlikely, dangerous, debatable, remarkable...

► I.e. mirative.

(6) *En wanbala dog jeya, imin tok la olabat thet dog. –wanim neim thet dog?*

and wan-INDIV dog there 3SgPst talk LOC 3PI DET dog what name DET dog

Maburl ai– Thei rekin gemin them yangboi bat.... maidi najing.

marble eye 3PI reckon ILL DET PI boy but EPIST NEG

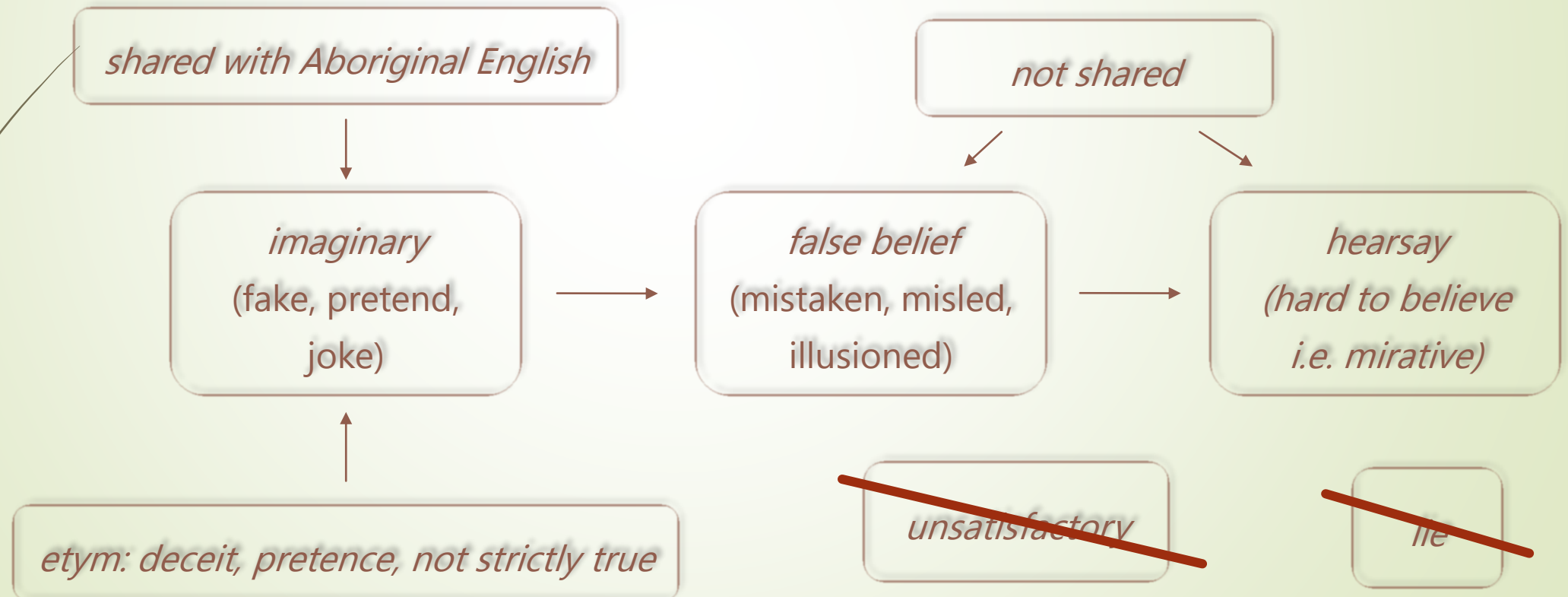
Maidi thei bin jas meigimap thad s[tori]

EPIST 3PI PST just make-TR-up DET story

And one dog that was there, it spoke to them that dog did – what's that dog's name? Marble Eye – (That's what) they reckon **apparently** those boys but... maybe not. Maybe they just made that story up. (Binjari; BR; Fladwada; 1, l112)

Usage in Kriol

- **Semantic map** of *gemen* as used in recent Kriol corpora.



Usage in Kriol

- ▶ Compared to its Aboriginal English counterpart *gammon*, Kriol *gemen*:
- ▶ Has further grammaticalized as a particle.
- ▶ Has 'subjectified'.
- ▶ I.e. its meaning is about epistemic/evidential modality.
- ▶ Not negative evaluation as in Aboriginal English.
- ▶ Mistaken-belief constructions widespread in Australian languages?
 - ▶ Spronck (2020).
- ▶ Is *gemen* on way to a typically Australian semantic configuration?

Questions

- ▶ Are media representations of *gammon* in Aboriginal English accurate?
- ▶ Is the Macquarie Dictionary description of *gammon* accurate?
 - ▶ It has been updated on account of reader input.
- ▶ Is there a difference between Aboriginal and colloquial Australian English?
- ▶ How much distortion occurs in media usage?
- ▶ Any consequences?
- ▶ Especially with emblematic items like *gammon*?

Take-home observations

- ▶ Beware of equating Aboriginal English and Kriol.
 - ▶ There is variation everywhere.
- ▶ Beware of assimilations.
 - ▶ Especially when Indigenous identities are involved.
- ▶ Beware of stereotypes!

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