

# ***Kun-dangwok*: “clan lects” and *Ausbau* in western Arnhem Land\***

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## *Abstract*

*The sociolinguistic concept of an *Ausbau* language is widely thought of as exclusively associated with the standardization of languages for the political and social purposes of nation states. Language policy initiated by state institutions, the development of literacy and new specialist registers of language are typical elements involved in the *Ausbau* process. However, the linguistic ideologies of small language groups such as those of the minority languages of Aboriginal Australia can drive certain forms of deliberate language elaboration. An important aspect of Aboriginal linguistic ideology is language diversity, reflected in the development of elemental sociolinguistic varieties such as patriclan lects. In the Bininj Kun-wok dialect chain of western Arnhem Land, a regional system of lectal differentiation known as *Kun-dangwok* has developed, reflecting an Aboriginal linguistic ideology whereby being different, especially different ways of speaking, are seen as central aspects of identity. The functions of the *Kun-dangwok* clan lect system are described using examples of naturally occurring conversation which provide evidence that clan lects are the result of an *Ausbau* process that results in the opposite of language standardization and an increase in *Abstand* between varieties.*

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of *Ausbau* and *Abstand* languages (Kloss 1967) has largely sprung from the sociolinguistic study of European languages, and there is little in the literature that applies this distinction to the sociopolitical status of the vast numbers of what would be considered “minority” languages of Aboriginal Australia and Oceania. Within Kloss’s distinction (1967: 159), the conventional view would perhaps describe Australian

languages as either *Abstand* languages remaining individually distinct because of their “intrinsic distance” from other languages, or merely as languages that have not been subjected to intentional reshaping or planned external development. This is of course a conclusion based on the corollary of the idea that *Ausbau* languages are phenomena of modern nation states and are built up under state-imposed language policies to suit the political purposes of such states. Small-scale hunter-gatherer societies are not usually thought to have engaged in institutional language development. But the elaboration of a language can be undertaken for a variety of reasons totally unrelated to notions of standardization, comparative prestige, and nation building. Corpus planning for Australian Aboriginal languages has been largely for the purpose of interpreting programs, Bible translation, community development initiatives, or language revitalization, and because of the small language communities involved, such work has been highly localized and rarely reported on outside of such small often remotely located communities (although an exception is Troy and Walsh 2004). Looking at a pre-colonial context, however, we see the elaboration or *Ausbau* processes that resulted from particular aspects of Aboriginal linguistic ideology, and this may help us understand something of the importance placed on multilingualism and difference as a part of identity in Aboriginal societies.

In this article I explore the question of how the notion of *Ausbau* might be applicable to language diversity in Australia, as in many other parts of the world where language elaboration is sometimes designed to create a degree of linguistic *Abstand*. Many fine-grained language variety distinctions mediated by social organization are recognized and named in Australian languages, and it is at this level I propose that, at least for the situation in pre-colonial Australia, lexical elaboration can be described essentially as an *Ausbau* process. This is ultimately designed to set their language varieties apart from those of others, but within the context of a system where the complementarity of sociolinguistic differentiation creates a regional system of clan, land, and language identity marking that transcends language boundaries. The example I will examine in detail is from a chain of dialects spoken in western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia, which are now collectively referred to (by linguists at least) as Bininj Kun-wok (Evans 2003a). This dialect chain is of interest because it has retained a system of very fine-grained patriclan-specific language varieties known as *Kun-dangwok* (literally *kun-dang-wok* ‘neuter-mouth-language’). This system is a regional feature that has been documented in at least three languages of the Gunwinjguan language family; Bininj Kun-wok,<sup>1</sup> Rembarrnga and Dalabon (Garde 2003: 62–76).

## 2. Elemental language varieties in Australian languages and some traditional notions of *Ausbau*

It would seem that in pre-colonial Australia, systems of fine-grained reference to language variety were once quite common but have been largely obscured in the wake of the disruption of colonization (Walsh 1997). In many Australian languages, lower-order sociolinguistic groups may be referred to by labels that reveal something of how speakers perceive the language variety designated. Such descriptive terms may translate as “hard (language)/soft (language),” “the language that uses the lexical item X,” or a group of language varieties each denoted by a particular demonstrative prominent in (but not necessarily exclusive to) the language. Named language varieties that also index membership in a land-owning descent group, such as patrilineal clans, have been described for the languages of Cape York Peninsula (Smith and Johnson 1986; Johnson 1991; Sutton 1978, 1991, 2001) and for central Australia (Nash 1991). In northeast Arnhem Land, further elaboration exists in the form of a correlation between shared linguistic features spoken by various clans and their moiety (Morphy 1977; Wilkinson 1991; Evans 2003a: 29–32). In western Arnhem Land, the Biniñ Kun-wok dialect chain and its neighbors Dalabon and Rembarrnga, to the south and southeast respectively, all feature a system of elemental language distinction whereby each patrilineal clan has a small set of lexical features exclusively owned by that clan. The central feature of the exclusive but very limited lexicon are clan-specific interjections and verbal prefixes (in addition to a small number of other lexical items), which when used in conversation or certain formal speech genres pragmatically index membership in a particular clan or acknowledge that the speaker is visiting a site of significance belonging to the clan that “owns” that particular interjection.

Applying the term *Ausbau* to explain the development of the speech of these smallest of sociolinguistic groups will be seen by some as drawing a long bow. The building up or development of languages in the context of *Ausbau* linguistics is usually associated with the advent of writing and the appearance of a body of literature, which develops through a process of developmental stages (Haugen 1966). The associated prestige and power that results from this process of literary development and declaration of language standards is an important element in the development of nation states. *Ausbau* languages are also often defined in terms of whether or not there is a diversity of specialist registers that have been developed in response to cultural and technological change. Formal processes relating to both the declaration of a language variety as having a new status and the planning of changes that will be made to the corpus of the language

in its new role are central developmental stages of an *Ausbau* language. These processes are hardly applicable to the social construction of language variation in Australian languages. Nonetheless, political processes in any society, no matter how small, can play important roles in influencing how languages are perceived and used. Deliberate linguistic elaboration, depending on the kind of values inherent in a particular linguistic culture, may drive languages in other directions far from the path of “standardization” and prestige associated with literacy.

The development of a variety of different language registers in a particular language is also not restricted to literate societies. Specialist registers exist in many Australian Aboriginal languages and it is clear that these have developed in response to particular features and expressions of linguistic culture or ideology.<sup>2</sup> In contemporary Aboriginal Australia, languages can also be built-up, developed, or standardized as part of the process of koineization that has occurred as the result of the setting up of church missions and government welfare settlements that brought together speakers of both many languages and many dialects of a particular language (e.g., Amery 1993). Likewise, church or government planners of regional Aboriginal settlements have historically made influential decisions about which indigenous languages should be promoted as community *lingue franche*, for Bible translation and the promotion of Christianity or for bilingual education programs run by the state.

In response to certain government language policies, Aboriginal people have often made very clear political ripostes, regardless of the small numbers of speakers involved. For example, in the north-central Arnhem Land Aboriginal settlement of Maningrida and its outstations there are about 11 languages spoken among about 2000 people. In the 1970s a government bilingual education initiative identified the Burarra language with the largest number of speakers in the community (about 600) and therefore this was the language chosen for the program. The Burarra people, whose traditional lands lie to the east of Maningrida, have migrated westwards to take advantage of the town’s services and now make up the largest language group resident in the Maningrida settlement. This proved totally unacceptable to the Kunibídjí people who are the traditional owners of the land on which the town was constructed in the late 1950s. Although with only about 150 speakers, the Kunibídjí insisted that a bilingual program for their language should also be instigated in the school. To date, no *lingua franca* has developed in Maningrida, the population remaining resolutely multilingual. It could be argued that this is largely the intended outcome of a covert language policy by Aboriginal people that values the equality of all languages and the norm of multilingualism.

The Klossian notion of *Ausbau* is both general and specific. On the general level, Goebel’s (1989: 286; italics in original) exploration of the meaning of Kloss’s *Ausbau* concept commences with the generalization, “Par Ausbau . . . on n’entend rien d’autre que l’action *humaine volontaire sur les langues*.” Under this definition, we have no problem applying the term *Ausbau* to the kinds of linguistic elaboration that result in the language varieties known as clan lects in Aboriginal Australia. In the language change model of Keller (1994), the actuation of the novel lexical elaboration of the *Kun-dangwok* system and its wider propagation is a “phenomenon of the third kind,” i.e., the actions of individual speakers with the same goal *could* collectively have a different result, even something far from what the individuals originally intended. In the case of *Kun-dangwok*, however, the outcome is very close to the original intention. But it is not known how the change proceeded, for example, whether or not the initial innovation was the design of speaker(s) from a single clan that later resulted in the propagation of the changes throughout all clans. The path along which the development of the *Kun-dangwok* system took place can be referred to as an “invisible hand process” (Keller 1994; Evans 2003b) but a process that commenced with very distinct social intentions.

In terms of the more specific aspects of *Ausbau* definition, however, corpus planning and status planning seem like the acts of nation-state institutions, but again, more general definitions of language policy (e.g., Schiffman 1996: 59) can subsume more covert aspects of linguistic culture. This can entail those beliefs that speakers hold in relation to the origins, structure, and communicative practices of a language but nevertheless can express themselves in very deliberate and overt acts of language elaboration. In the case of clan lects, and the *Kun-dangwok* system in particular, it appears that at some point in time, certain lexical markers of clan affiliation have been deliberately invented and adopted by each of the patriclans in the region.

Unsurprisingly though, there are limits to the sociolinguistic commonalities between Australian languages and those, say, in modern Europe. The sociological phenomena of deliberately reshaped languages linked to the identity of modern nation states and whose standardization is overseen in some countries by state-controlled institutions is of course lacking in the linguistic culture of Aboriginal Australia. Nevertheless, in Australia language variety is, according to traditional cultural canon, linked to regional territory but with a complex overlay and interaction with socially constituted language varieties that are not always well-bounded and autonomous. The languages of Cape York Peninsula present us with a good example of this interaction, and work by Sutton (1978, 1991,

2001) has warned against exaggerating the comparison of Aboriginal language diversity with the situation in other parts of the world:

There has been a tendency for analysts to look for neat systems in which each person belongs to one and only one language group, language groups are socially well bounded and relatively autonomous, and language groups are associated with single continuous tracts of landscape ... [these] kinds of tendency towards simplification and harmonisation need to be treated with a healthy scepticism. (Sutton 1991: 51)

It is in the context of this intensive social interaction, however, that the lexical elaboration of the *Kun-dangwok* system has developed.

### 3. Linguistic diversity and Australian languages

Linguists have been at pains to emphasize the complexities and in many cases the inappropriateness of terms such as “dialectal tribe,” “speech community,” and “language group” in Australian sociolinguistic description (Rigsby and Sutton 1982; Sutton 1991; Rumsey 1993). The study of dialectal and sociolectal diversity in Aboriginal Australia has to date resulted in the description of extraordinary variation. In small Aboriginal settlements across the Top End of the Northern Territory, for example, it is not unusual to find between five and ten or more distinct languages spoken among a small population of between one and two thousand polyglot individuals. Within each of these distinct languages there may also be other named varieties; dialects, clan or moiety lects, and totemic language varieties.

A new nomenclatural toolbox is required for delving into this area, as in many cases there are no terms for the large number of senses of the word “language” such that when it comes to actually working out just how many languages there were in Australia at the time of first contact with Europeans, the answer very much depends on the definition of the term “language” (Walsh 1997). There is a tendency in Aboriginal Australia for all named language varieties to be considered distinct or unique “languages” (e.g., Wilkinson 1991: 5 for languages in northeast Arnhem Land) even when closely related and mutually intelligible. Small differences, whether they be lexical, phonological, grammatical, or some other expressions of cultural practice that have entered the language, can be highly significant and enough to result in a distinct label for a language variety. In some ways, the basic language-as-language versus language-as-dialect distinction is an artifice of the notion of *Ausbau* languages as

we would recognize them across the nation states of Europe and Asia. Language varieties are then defined in relationship to the imputed prestigious variety, the standard as opposed to the mere dialect. The term “dialect” becomes a relational concept.

In many parts of Aboriginal Australia, language name nomenclature reflects social organization along clan lines such that in terms of named varieties, linguists would be describing a system (in the sense of a publicly stated ideal or folk model) of named dialects and lects, with higher ordinate collective labels for what linguists would call “dialect chains” being largely nonexistent.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of higher ordinate labels, it has largely been linguists and anthropologists who have coined terms for what Dixon (1976, 1980: 33) and Walsh (1997: 396) have referred to as language-as-language:language<sub>1</sub> as opposed to language-as-dialect:language<sub>2</sub>. The indigenous folk models of language difference nearly always result in larger numbers of language varieties than the linguist’s dialectology would produce (thus Walsh’s [1997: 399] “geographical dialects” or “languages<sub>1a</sub>” and “other named varieties” or “languages<sub>1b</sub>”). This is perhaps in part attributable to the sensitivity of a culture whose religion, social organization, and polity have emphasized multilingualism as the norm.

Such diversity can be demonstrated by a journey I recently took from my home in Kakadu National Park in the Top End of the Northern Territory to the Cobourg Peninsula in northwest Arnhem Land, a distance of about 150 kilometers. The journey commenced in Gundjeihmi language territory at the town of Jabiru and driving north some forty kilometers are the language territories of Gaagudju, Urningangk, and Erre near the East Alligator River, the latter representing the Arnhem Land border. Crossing the river and driving northeast from here, a further ten kilometers took us into the community of Kunbarlanja (also known as Oenpelli), which is the traditional land associated with the Mengerr language. Driving from here north toward Wak Station, we passed through Amurdak country and then into the estates of Iwaidja-speaking people on Cobourg Peninsula. At a coastal landing we met up with a group of Iwaidja-speaking people who had come two or three kilometers by boat across the Bowen Straight from Mangkuldalgij (Croker Island), the traditional homeland for the Marrku language. All in all, within the 150 kilometer trip, we passed through country associated with about eight distinct languages representing four language families and at least 13 patrician estates.

Explaining linguistic diversity in social terms involving both cultural factors and the role of political (Mühlhäusler 1987), religious (Sutton 1997), and environmental/ecological (Hill 1978) motivations has been

well noted and there is no need for me to expand on them here. Central to all of these forces driving multilingualism, however, is the notion of difference and identity (Brandl and Walsh 1982). Wherever Aboriginal population density has increased, so has language diversity. There is not only a pressure that creates and maintains difference between distinct languages, but also “between linguistic varieties spoken by the same community of people and their direct descendants” (Sutton 1997: 220) as is the case with clan lects. Linguistic distinctiveness is an emblematic key to identity. Within the context of conservative aspects of hunter-gatherer societies, there is always a balancing need to set off similarities with differences and innovation. Developing distinctive ways of speaking within the most elemental of social groups such as patrilines satisfies this tension that drives people to be different, but its existence within an areal system that cuts across language groups simultaneously displays a feature that is common to all.

#### 4. *Kun-dangwok* and the Bininj Kun-wok dialect chain

Bininj Kun-wok is a collective label of referential convenience for a chain of dialects that stretches from Kakadu National Park in the west, south to the town of Pine Creek across the Arnhem Land plateau, and east to the lower Liverpool and Mann Rivers just south of the settlement of Maningrida (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> There are about 2500–3000 speakers. There is also a large number of labels for both individual varieties and groups of varieties. One of the many lists is Table 1 (see also Table 3, which illustrates the complexity of language variety labeling, each variety label being a shifter depending on the variety using the label).

Table 1. *A list of Bininj Kun-wok language varieties*

| Dialect name  | Associated region or place where spoken         |
|---|---|
| Kunwinjku   | Kunbarlanja, Kumadderr River region             |
| Kuninjku  | South of Maningrida, Liverpool and Mann Rivers  |
| Mayali  | Manyallaluk (Eva Valley), Pine Creek, Katherine |
| Kundedjnjenhmi                                      | Arnhem Land plateau                             |
| Gun-djeihmi   | Kakadu National Park                            |
| Kune:   | Cadell River outstations:                       |
| 1. Kune Dule-kerlk ('soft<br>tune/intonation Kune') | 1. Borlkdam, Ankababirri, Buluh Karduru         |
| 2. Kune Dule-rayek ('hard<br>tune/intonation Kune') | 2. Korlobidahdah                                |



*Kun-dangwok* (also referred to as *dangwokno*) is a system that further differentiates lectal varieties according to lexical choice.<sup>5</sup> While some patrilineal language varieties have different words for common nouns (usually plants, animals, and items of material culture; see Table 2), the main difference is through use of clan-specific interjections. Every patriclan of the Arnhem Land plateau *Sprachbund* has its own special interjection or set of interjections and verbal prefixes.<sup>6</sup> In Bininj Kun-wok, these interjections are sometimes (but not always) also prefixed by the *kun-* noun class prefix (the class into which *kun-wok* “language” falls) as in (1) below:

- (1) *kun-walakkurd* ‘Darnkolo clan *dangwokno*’  
*kun-dedjjanjbak* ‘Kardbam clan *dangwokno*’  
*kun-dedjwarre* ‘Kurulk clan *dangwokno*’

In the absence of a term that can be prefixed by the noun class prefix *kun-*, the most common expression is to just refer to the *Kun-dangwok* of a particular group as *dangwokno bedberre x-kabirri-yime* ‘their patrillect, they say “x”’ (where “x” is the name of the specific interjection). Bininj Kun-wok speakers might refer to such special lects by the name of their patriclan prefixed with the *kun-* (language class) prefix, such as *Kun-kurulk* ‘the language of the Kurulk clan’. When the term *Kun-dangwok* or *dangwokno* is used, however, the focus is more on the special set of interjections particular to individual patriclans.

Patrillect-specific lexical items sometimes appear to be borrowings from more distant dialects or other languages — a kind of unusual regional convergence that ironically marks local diversification.<sup>7</sup> What might be considered a locally distinct patrillect word by one clan may be considered a more widely shared lexical item by other speakers from more distant different dialects and languages.<sup>8</sup> Such difference however becomes an important part of local identity. In discussions about linguistic identity with people from various dialect groups, lexical differences between immediate neighbors are central to how speakers distinguish themselves — “We Kune say the word *kayakki* for ‘no’ and those Kunwinjku people to the west say *burrkyak*.” (Although Gun-djeihmi speakers further to the west of Kunwinjku also use the word *kayakki* ‘no’). Such “shiboleth” phenomena may suggest that patrilineal differences are an intentional elaboration or invention and that borrowing from more distant languages is one source for their development. A sample of words given as patrillect vocabulary and their alternative equivalents (from the opposite moiety or what is considered the unmarked version) are in Table 2.<sup>9</sup>

The use of *Kun-dangwok* interjections within a sentence is, in certain contexts, a pragmatic marker of particular clan membership and, in others, a recognition that one is visiting (often for the first time) a site as-

Table 2. *Examples of patrilect lexical items*

| Lexical item   | Patrilect/Moiety                                  | Opposite moiety or otherwise unmarked equivalent   |
|--|---|--|
| <i>barlkkidj</i> , <i>labud</i> 'male agile wallaby'           | Kundedjwarre (Kurulk patrilect)                   | <i>warradjangkal</i> ,<br>Rembarrnga = <i>barlkkidj</i> 'male agile wallaby'<br>Dalabon = <i>labud</i> 'agile wallaby' |
| <i>barndjarr</i> 'freshwater bivalve muscle'                   | Kundedjwarre (Kurulk clan patrilect)              | <i>kurruk</i> (ordinary Kuninjku name, either moiety)  |
| <i>man-djandadj</i> 'sand palm <i>Livistonia humilis</i> '     | <i>yirridjja</i> moiety (Kuninjku dialect)        | <i>djendek</i>   |
| <i>djabel</i> 'mouth almighty (fish) <i>Glossamia aprion</i> ' | Kundedjwarre (Kurulk clan patrilect)              | <i>djenbarrang</i> (other Kuninjku)<br>Kunwinjku = <i>djabel</i>   |
| man-mayhdedj 'edible tuber, <i>Amorphophallus sp.</i> '        | Kunwalidjaw (Kulmarru clan patrilect-duwa moiety) | <i>yirridjja</i> name is <i>djedbarlh</i> , another <i>duwa</i> patrilect name (Kundedjwarre) is <i>walangari</i>      |

sociated with the clan who owns the interjection used. Conversations with the spirits of the dead are also sprinkled with *Kun-dangwok* interjections. These and further functions are discussed below.

An interesting feature of the interjections associated with *Kun-dangwok* is syntactic variation. Some clans have *Kun-dangwok* interjections that are free standing and can either precede or follow the verbal complex. Others have verbal prefixes inserted between the pronominal verbal prefix and the verb root. As Bininj Kun-wok (but also the neighboring Gunwinjguan family languages Rembarrnga and Dalabon) are polysynthetic languages that allow nominal, adverbial, and other types of incorporation into the verbal complex, the markers for those clans that allow the prefixing of their *Kun-dangwok* appear as in the following illustrations: Without *Kun-dangwok* prefix:

- (2) *Yi-kinje-men!*  
2sg-cook-IMP  
'You cook it!'

With the Djordi clan's *Kun-dangwok* prefix:

- (3) *Yi-njarra-kinjemen!*  
2sg-[Djordi.clan.interj.]-cookIMP  
'You *njarra* cook it!'

As I was eliciting the various interjections for a range of Biniŋ Kun-wok patriclans, I initially thought they were all interjections as the first examples I had heard were so. When I asked for the lexical item for what was apparently a clan that uses their *Kun-dangwok* marker as a verbal prefix, and I then used it incorrectly as a free-standing form, I was howled down with derisive laughter and given an illustrative sentence with its correct syntactic placement. Biniŋ Kun-wok *Kun-dangwok* interjections seem to be examples of ethno-syntax (Enfield 2002). That is, the syntactic rules relating to *Kun-dangwok* interjections index social information. Table 4 lists a collection of *Kun-dangwok* for a variety of selected patriclans and the syntactic status of the *Kun-dangwok* term. There are examples (e.g., the Mok clan) that have more than one *Kun-dangwok* marker, one of which is a prefix, the other an interjection. Some clans have split into two, each subgroup or lineage with their own *Kun-dangwok* (see the Bordoh clan in Table 4). Note also that this is a regional feature that cuts across Biniŋ Kun-wok into at least two other members of the Gunwinyguan language family, Rembarrnga and Dalabon (see the example for Warradjngu clan, members of which speak Rembarrnga and Kune languages).

It would seem that some clans who are in joint “company” relationships can share certain *Kun-dangwok*. Company clans are always clans of the same patri-moiety whose estates are contiguous and who together consider each other’s estates as shared territory. An example is the Kurulk and Kulmarru company relationship. Both these clans use the prefix *-bayid-* as part of their *Kun-dangwok* repertoire, but it is nonetheless still possible to distinguish the two clans as they both use distinct names for their respective *Kun-dangwok*. This naming of *Kun-dangwok* varieties by using a neuter noun class prefix on a patrilect lexeme seems to be restricted to only the Kuninjku dialect. The Kurulk patrilect is called *Kun-dedjwarre* and the Kulmarru version is called *Kun-walidjaw*. Close historical economic ties, the sharing of resources, and ritual identity (both Kurulk and Kulmarru men share totemic emblems in certain religious rites) are reflected by shared use of *Kun-dangwok* lexical items. On the other hand, there are also finer grained distinctions relating to *Kun-dangwok* use even within a single patriclan. Table 4 provides examples of single clans composed of a number of different family groups or lineages (e.g., Bolmo and Bordoh) who each have their own distinct *Kun-dangwok*. Here we may have the early evolution of diversity even within the most elemental of sociolinguistic groups.

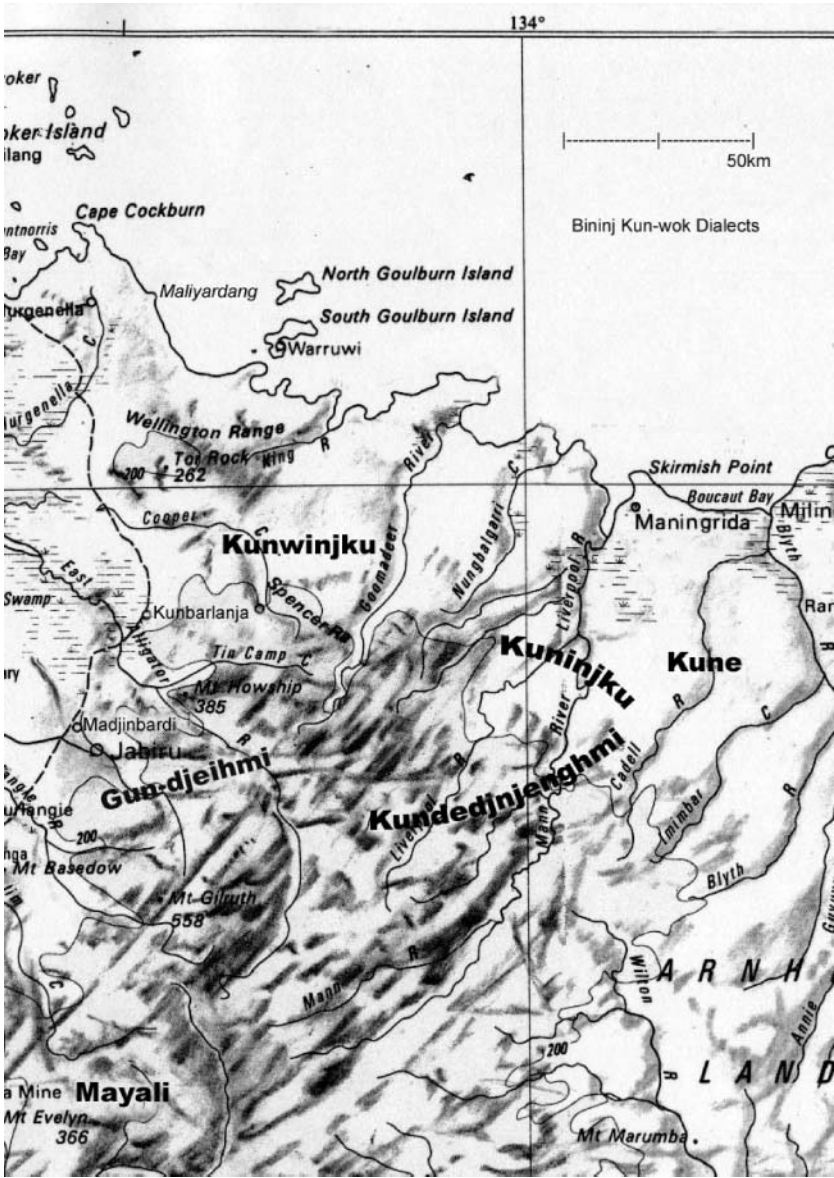


Figure 1. A map of the dialects of Bininj Kun-wok in western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory Australia

Table 3. *Bininj Kun-wok language variety labels*

|  | Gun-djeihmi  | Kunwinjku   | Kuninjku                               | Kune<br>Dulerayek  | Kune<br>Narayek  | Kundedjnjenghmi                  | Manyallaluk<br>Mayali |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| The<br>Gundjeihmi<br>use these<br>terms:     | – Gundjeihmi<br>– an-rayek<br>– ‘ <i>woh arri-yime</i> ’<br>– Mayali | Kunwinjku   | Bininj<br>Bulkey                       | ?  | ?  | – Kundedjnjenghmi<br>– Mayali    | Mayali                |
| The Kunwinjku<br>use these<br>terms:         | – Gundjeihmi<br>– (Mayali)   | Kunwinjku   | Kunwinjku-<br>Kunrayek                 | Kunwinjku-<br>Kunrayek                                     | Kunwinjku-<br>Kunrayek                                     | – Kundedjnjenghmi<br>– Kun-rayek | Kunwinjku             |
| The Kuninjku<br>use these<br>terms:          | Gundjeihmi   | – Kunrinjku<br>– Kun-kerlk<br>– burrkyak                                      | – Kuninjku<br>– Kun-rayek<br>– kayakki | – Kurruh<br>– Kun-rayek                                    | – Kurruh<br>– Kun-rayek                                    | – Kundedjnjenghmi<br>– Kunwinjku | Mayali                |
| The Kune<br>Dulerayek<br>use these<br>terms: | Gundjeihmi   | – Kundangburd-<br>djikaberrk<br>– Berreboyen<br>– Kundangyohmi<br>– Kun-kerlk | – Kuninjku<br>– Na-kerlk<br>– Buboyen  | – Kune<br>– Dule-rayek<br>– Buboyen                        | – Kune<br>– Dule-kerlk<br>– Buboyen                        | – Mayali<br>– Kundedjnjenghmi    | Mayali                |
| The Kune Na-<br>rayek use<br>these terms:    | – Gundjeihmi<br>– Kunkerneyhmi                                       | – Kundangburd-<br>djikaberrk<br>– Berreboyen<br>– Kundangyohmi<br>– Kun-kerlk | – Kuninjku<br>– Na-kerlk<br>– Buboyen  | – Kune<br>– Na-kerlk<br>– Kune<br>– Kun-kerlk<br>– Buboyen | – Kune<br>– Na-rayek<br>– Kune<br>– Kun-rayek<br>– Buboyen | – Mayali<br>– Kundedjnjenghmi    | Mayali                |

Table 4. Kun-dangwok expressions for selected clans

| Clan name                            | <i>Kun-dangwok</i> term(s)<br>(prefixes given in their<br>nominal form with <i>-no</i><br>suffix) | Illustrative sentence   | Grammatical<br>form                |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Balngarra<br>(Bolkdjam<br>lineage)   | duh   | <i>Duh karri-raray.</i><br>'Let's go!'  | interjection                       |
| Bolmo<br>(Marlkawo<br>lineage)       | Ngabbarna, barna<br>Kek barna! 'is that so!'  | <i>Ngabbarna nga-re.</i><br>'I'm going.'  | interjection                       |
| Bordoh<br>(Naborlhborlh<br>lineage). | bordohbordoh  | <i>Bordohbordoh karri-re.</i><br>'Let's go.'  | interjection                       |
| Bordoh<br>(Guymala<br>lineage)       | barmene   | <i>Barmene kandi-wo.</i><br>'(You all) Give it to<br>me.'   | interjection                       |
| Darnkolo                             | kadji-no<br>-walakkurd  | <i>Karri-kadji-re karri-<br/>kadji-djangkan.</i><br>'Let's go hunting.'<br><i>Man-walakkurd kano.</i><br>'Give me a small<br>amount of food.'   | prefix and other<br>nominal forms  |
| Djordi                               | njarra-no<br>(-njarra-)   | <i>Ngarri-njarra-re.</i><br>'We are going.'<br><i>Ngarri-njarra-borledme.</i><br>'We all turn around.'  | prefix                             |
| Kurulk                               | Kun-dedjwarre<br>prefix -bayid-no   | <i>Kandi-bayid-wo, nga-<br/>bayid-ngun man-me.</i><br>'Give me some, I'll eat<br>some food.'  | prefix, nominal                    |
| Mok                                  | yakkake<br>-buk(-no)  | <i>Yakkake kandi-wo.</i><br>'Give it to me!'<br><i>Kandi-buk-wo, nga-buk-<br/>ngun.</i><br>'Give me some food, I'll<br>eat.'                    | both prefix and<br>interjection    |
| Kulmaru<br>Kurnumbidj                | <i>Kun-walidjaw</i><br><br><i>prefixes:</i> <sup>10</sup><br>-bayid-no<br>-walih-no               | <i>Man-walidjaw kan-wo.</i><br>'Give me a little food.'<br>... . <i>nanih Kamarrang,<br/>ka-wokdi nungan kun-<br/>walihno kun-wok<br/>nuye.</i> | prefixes<br><br>-walih-<br>-bayid- |

Table 4 (Continued)

| Clan name                          | <i>Kun-dangwok</i> term(s)<br>(prefixes given in their<br>nominal form with <i>-no</i><br>suffix) | Illustrative sentence   | Grammatical<br>form  |
|------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------|
|                                    |   | ‘This Kamarrang here<br>speaks his own<br>patrilect called <i>kun-<br/>walihno</i> .’<br><i>Kan-walih-wo ngarr-<br/>walih-ngun</i> .                                    | nominal<br>-walidjaw |
| Warradjngu                         | -djarlæ-  | ‘Give me some and let’s<br>eat it.’<br><i>Nga-djarlæ-rongara</i> .  | prefix               |
| Wurrbbarn<br>(Badkorol<br>lineage) | dabba-no  | ‘I’m going.’ (note, this is<br>Rembarrnga<br>language)<br><i>Karri-dabba-djangkan</i> .<br>‘Let’s go hunting.’<br><i>Karri-dabba-djuhme</i> .<br>‘Let’s go for a swim.’ | prefix               |

## 5. The functions of *Kun-dangwok*

Because of the sometimes lengthy and somewhat affected nature of utterances with *Kun-dangwok* interjections, it is clear that they involve a high degree of markedness and are often (but not always) used in situations of some formality. Such contexts are highly suitable for public displays of difference in identity marking. Such contexts include:

1. Calling out to ancestral spirits when visiting a site after a long absence
2. Referring to a particular clan estate
3. Making formal requests
4. Metalinguistic topics
5. Certain forms of humor

### 5.1. *Addressing the dead*

Whenever Aboriginal people in western Arnhem Land return to a site they have not visited for a long time, a senior member of the visiting

party will call out to the spirits of ancestors who used to camp at the site. It is believed that inappropriate behavior at a site or the presence of strangers unfamiliar with the place might invoke the wrath of these spirits resulting in accidents, illness, or some other kind of misadventure on the part of the visitors. In order to avoid this, the most senior visitor will call out to the spirits using the *Kun-dangwok* relevant to the site or in the *Kun-dangwok* of his or her own clan as evidence of the visitor's credentials and right to come to the place. In Bininj Kun-wok, this special process of addressing the spirits is designated by the general word *-woknan* (literally *wok* 'word' *nan* 'see') 'to greet/leave-take' and usually involves calling out the names of any visitors and describing one's own social relationships to the site or the deceased who once lived there. In this context, *Kun-dangwok* is used as proof of one's association with the site or one's right to be there and use its resources. In some patrilineal clans, there are a number of special interjections that one uses in addressing ancestral spirits. The following text is an extract of a speech made by Mick Kubarkku, a senior Kuninjku dialect speaker, addressing ancestral spirits when a group of Aboriginal people and myself were visiting some rock art shelters at a site called Ngandarrayo in a region said to be a company estate shared by Kurulk, Kulmaru, and Bordoh clans. In fact, he addresses a named individual evidenced by the use of the second-person-singular prefix *yi-* on verbs (lines 4–7). All *Kun-dangwok* words in this and further examples are underlined.<sup>11</sup>

(4)

1 MK: *Kun-red bu ngarri-h-re ngarrben-bukka-n kandi-bekka-n*  
IV-place REL 1a-IMM-go 12/3a-show-NP 2a/1-listen-NP  
*ngayi Nakarndja*

1 prop.n.

2 *wanjh kan-bekka-n ngayi kan-bengka-n kakkak ngayi*  
SEQ 2/1-listen-NP 1 2/1-listen-NP MM(B) 1  
*ngandi-djumdoy kondah bu*  
3a/1-call(Z)DC LOC REL

3 *ngarri-m-h-re.*

1a-hither-IMM-go

'This place we are going to, let's show it to them, listen to me Nakarndja (ancestor's name), you know me, I am your grandchild (your sister's daughter's son) from this place where we are coming to.'

4 *En nga-bengka-n ngarduk bininj. En yi-bekka-n bu*  
CONJ 1-know-NP 1POSS people CONJ 2-listen-NP REL  
*ngarri-bukka-n*  
1a/3-show-NP



- 5        *yi-kodj-mak-ni*        *Kundedjwarre-ni-n*  
 2-head-good-STAT clan.lect-be-IMP  
*yi-bayid-kurrme-rr-imen.*  
 2-INTERJ-put-RR-IMP
- 6        *Yi-bayid-yirri-yo-yo*        *Kundedjwarre-ni-n*  
 2-INTERJ-in.line-REDUP-lie clan.lect-be-IMP  
*Namayhkurdihwarr*  
 clan.lect.INTERJ
- 7        *Namarrkmowadardjarr. En*        *yi-dudje-rr-en*  
 clan.lect.INTERJ        CONJ 2-bury-RR-NP  
*yi-kurrme-rr-imen en*        *ngarri-ka-n*  
 2-put-RR-IMP        CONJ 1a-take-NP
- 8        *ka-bolk-na-n bu kun-red kun-mak rowk.*  
 3-place-see-NP REL IV-camp IV-good all

‘I know my people. And when you hear us showing this place to them (the visiting non-Aboriginal people) just be at peace and [in Kundedjwarre lect] remain where you have placed yourselves. Stay where you are [I appeal using the Kundedjwarre lect words of] Namayhkurdihwarr Namarrkmowadardjarr. Keep yourselves buried, we are going to show him (the visitor) this place and everything will be OK.’

The objective during these kinds of formal occasions is to convince the ancestral spirits of one’s right to visit the site based on the correct kinship connections (line 2) and knowledge of the correct *Kun-dangwok* associated with the site. Other special patrilect interjections (lines 6 and 7 *Namayhkurdihwarr*, *Namarrkmowadardjarr*) are used in no other contexts except this one. They are like password terms that allow one access to a site without invoking the wrath of ancestral spirits.

Apart from the insertion of various patrilect interjections, there is also a form of reduplication that seems to be particular to *Kun-dangwok* utterances. An example from (4) above is in line 6, *yi-bayid-yirri-yo-yo*, which is an iterative form not used in ordinary speech (at least in the Kuninjku dialect, from which this illustration is taken).<sup>12</sup> Likewise the illustrative example given for the Balngarra *dangwokno* ‘*duh*’ involves a similar form of CV reduplication.

- (5) *Duh karri-ra-ra-y!*  
 INTERJ 12a-go-go-IMP  
 ‘Let’s [all?] go!’

Another feature again is the lengthening of final syllables as they are called out and a particular intonation that involves a rising pitch of final syllables. The following example is by Bolmo clan member Jack Djandjo-

merr calling out to ancestral spirits as he leads a group of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal bush walkers across a traditional walking track that had not been used for many years:

(6)

- 1 JN: *Ngabbarna ngarri-re: dabbarrabbo:lk yawurrinj*  
 clan.lectINTERJ 1a-go ancestors young.men  
*ngabin-mirnde-kan*  
 1/3a-many-take  
 ‘[In Bolmo patrilect] we are traveling ancestors, the young men,  
 I’m taking them all’
- 2 *yawurrinj kabirri-bolk-bengka-n ba ngarrban-ka-n Murray,*  
 young.men 3a/1-place-know-NP so 12/3a-take-NP pers.n.  
*ngayeh, . . . .*  
 1  
 ‘the young men, they know the country so we can take Murray,  
 me’
- 3 *Victor, and na-ngale ka-ngey-yo wardi . . . . .*  
 pers.n. I-IGN 3-name-lieNP SEQ  
*Graham, Marcus,*  
 pers.n. pers.n.  
 ‘Victor and who else um. . . . . Graham and Marcus’
- 4 *Maxie, kandi-bengka bu ngarr-re andehne an-bo:lk*  
 pers.n 3a/1-knowIMP REL 12-go IIIDEM III-place  
*arri-bebme Kolorrhyi-kah*  
 1a-arriveNP place.n.-LOC  
 ‘Maxie, know who we are! so we will follow this track and  
 arrive at Kalorrhyi’
- 5 *Kolorrhyi arri-bebme la Kamarrkawarn wanjh*  
 place.n. 1a-arriveNP CONJ place.n. SEQ  
*arri-kadju-ng ngarri-yong-en*  
 1a-follow-NP 1a-make.camp-NP  
 ‘and from Kolorrhyi we will go to Kamarrkawarn and follow  
 the track and make camp in’
- 6 *ku-wardde maitbi o kun-kanalanj malamalayi*  
 LOC-rock might.be or IV-sand tomorrow  
*ngarri-malayi-bebme*  
 1a-tomorrow-arriveNP
- 7 *Kamarrkawarn.*  
 place.n.  
 ‘the rocky area maybe or on the sand and tomorrow we will  
 reach Kamarrkawarn.’

Notice how the speaker commences his speech to the ancestral spirits with his Bolmo clan interjection and then proceeds to identify those present. He further makes himself familiar to these spirits by calling out the names of sites along the route where they are traveling and is careful also to use, at least part of the time, the variety of Bininj Kun-wok spoken in this area, Kundedjnjenghmi, as evidenced by his use of the Kundedjnjenghmi and Gun-djeihmi demonstrative *andehne* and other features of these dialects such as the occasional dropping of nasals off the pronominal prefixes on verbs and noun-class prefixes (e.g., line 4, *arri-bebme* not *ngarri-bebme* ‘we’ll arrive’ and *an-bolk* not *man-bolk* ‘walking track’). These various kinds of markedness are auto-indexes of the speaker’s social identity. In expanded paraphrase, the speaker is addressing ancestral spirits with the message ‘I am Bolmo clan, I speak the Bininj Kun-wok language variety associated with this place which you spoke, and I am knowledgeable about this place. Because I belong here, I have a right to bring strangers here and I know the cultural protocols for doing this, so don’t harm us.’ Having a very distinct and local identity established through the use of locally distinctive ways of speaking has in this case a very important function. A person’s right to be and camp in a particular place, to exploit the resources of that place, and to bring strangers to that place is evidenced by the way one speaks and for every tract of country there is an appropriate *Kun-dangwok* that functions as a passport.<sup>13</sup>

## 5.2. *Kun-dangwok in reference to land*

Another function of *Kun-dangwok* use, which I will mention briefly here, is as a means of referring to a particular territory or clan estate of a patriclan. Once when I asked a senior Kundedjnjenghmi speaker a question about who owned a particular site in the East Alligator region, he gave me a *dangwokno* interjection as the answer:

(7)

MG: *Na-ngale nuye kun-red Muri?*

I-IGN 3POSS IV-place prop.n.

‘Who owns the place called Muri?’

BN: *Andale abayeng.*

patrilectINTERJ

[The patriclan that uses the interjection] *andale abayeng* [i.e., pragmatically infers the Kundjikurdubuk lineage of the Warddjak patriclan]

This seemed a very indirect way of referring to the clan owners, but the context was that earlier that day I had been discussing *dangwokno* interjection expressions with this man and so he knew I had the background knowledge to access the meaning inferred by his use of this expression.

### 5.3. *Use of Kun-dangwok for making requests*

When Bininj Kun-wok speakers explain the situated use of *Kun-dangwok*, they often use illustrative sentences involving requests for food (a look at the illustrative sentences provided in Table 4 bears this out). One practice, at least in the Kuninjku dialect, is for a *Kun-dangwok* interjection (one which remains productive in that noun-class prefixes can attach to it) to be prefixed with the food/vegetable class prefix *man-* with the sense of ‘small amount of food’. Examples include:

- (8) *man-walidjaw* ‘small amount of food’ [Kulmarru clan  
patrilect *kun-walidjaw*]  
*man-dedjwarre* ‘small amount of food’ [Kurulk clan patrilect,  
*kun-dedjwarre*]  
*man-djanjdjanjbak* ‘small amount of food’ [Kardbam clan  
patrilect, *kun-djanjdjanjbak*]

The use of *Kun-dangwok* for requests, especially those involving food, can be in both formal and informal contexts. In more formal situations, it would seem to be a polite way of saving face and possibly some indirect way of reminding the food provider of the social obligations to hand over the resource. I have also frequently heard family groups using *Kun-dangwok* interjections in their informal requests to each other in quite unmarked domestic situations. On one occasion, I heard a woman of the Darnkolo clan married to a Kulmarru clansman ask her husband to hand her a small amount of food the family had prepared. In her request she used the *Kun-dangwok* of her husband’s clan:

- (9) *Kan-o man-walidjaw.*  
 2/1-giveIMP III-INTERJ  
 ‘Give me a little bit (of the food).’

One can speculate that this kind of usage leads to the stripping of the original pragmatic function (as a patrilect index) en route to a form of language change resulting in the development of new dialects. Because marriage often occurs between people in neighboring clans (as is the case in the above *man-walidjaw* example), lexical innovation is easily propagated among speakers with contiguous clan territories. In this case it

might be a new variety called *kun-walidjawmi*,<sup>14</sup> the dialect which uses the interjection *walidjaw*. Kundedjnjenghmi speakers, for example, still use the interjection *dedjnjengh* in their speech from time to time, but instead of it indexing clan membership, it has become a general marker of regional dialect — ‘the way the people from the Arnhem Land plateau speak’. Likewise, Kune dialect speakers who use the interjection *kurruh* are referred to by other dialects as *kabirri-kurruhme* ‘the people who say *kurruh*’. It is possible that these interjection forms *dedjnjengh* and *kurruh* (both of which are completely semantically opaque, as are all *Kun-dangwok* interjections) had their origins as patriclan-specific *Kun-dangwok* words. It is in this case an example of an original *Ausbau* design (still under the pressure of a particular covert language “policy” or ideology that values language diversity) producing a new unplanned innovation. In this case, the result is the creation of a higher-order regional language variation.

#### 5.4. *Metalinguistic, ritual, and humorous uses*

Despite the usually formal uses for *Kun-dangwok* described above, I would have to say that the most frequent context for *Kun-dangwok* use that I have heard is in discussions about the system itself and people joking among themselves by using *Kun-dangwok* interjections in pretend situations where they would be otherwise used in their “proper” context. Older speakers seem to enjoy explaining the system to younger relatives and using it in a metalinguistic and didactic sense. The following is an example where a senior woman is explaining her Kurulk clan *Kun-dangwok* to her grandchildren (young adults) and myself. She finishes by describing how in her clan lect, hunter’s talk to agile wallabies in the form of a rather vulgar invocation either to make the wallabies easier to spear or as an expression of frustration at not being able to catch one:

(10)

- 1 NK: *Ngudda Kun-djanidjanjbak, nungan na-walidjaw.*  
 2sg IV-prop.n.(patrilect) 3EMPH I-prop.n.(patrilect)  
*Ngayi nga-yime*  
 1 1-sayNP  
 ‘You (have as a patrilect) Kundjedjenbak, he (RL, her grandson) is na-Walidjaw (patrilect), I say’
- 2 *Kun-dedjwarre namarrkmowadardjarr, namayhkurdihwarr*  
 IV-prop.n. patrilectINTERJ patrilectINTERJ  
*yi-bayid-yu-yu-n*  
 2-INTERJ-REDUP-lie-IMP

- ‘in Kundedjwarre patrilect the words *namarrkmowadardjarr*,  
*namayhkurdihwarr*, you “*bayid*” sleep-sleep’  
 3 *nga-yime*.  
 1-say  
 ‘I say.’
- 4 MG: *En bale nga-yime worokidj?*  
 CONJ what 1-sayNP INTERJ  
 ‘What do I say, *worokidj*?’
- 5 NK: *E’e nakka worokidj ngudda-ke. Ngayi*  
 yes IDEM INTERJ 2-POSS 1  
*nga-bayid-duh-durnde-ng nga-yime*.  
 1-INTERJ-REDUP-return-NP 1-say  
 ‘Yes, you’re *worokidj*, that’s yours. I “*bayid*-return” is what I  
 say.’
- 6 *Kun-dedjwarre ka-ni nga-yime nga-bayid-yu-n kaluk*  
 IV-prop.n. 3-sit 1-say 1-INTERJ-lie-NP SEQ  
*ngulamanjmak*  
 tomorrow  
 ‘In Kundedjwarre I say I’m going to *bayid*-sleep, tomorrow’<sup>15</sup>
- 7 *ngarr-wok-barrhbu-rr-en*.  
 12-word-attain.next.day-RR-NP  
 ‘we’ll talk in the morning.’
- 8 RL: *Yoh kunu bedberre kun-wok*.  
 yes IVDEM 3aPOSS IV-language  
 ‘Yes, that’s their way of talking.’
- 9 NK: *Ngarduk ngayi kun-wok. Yo man-ekke. Mane ngayi*  
 IPOSS 1 IV-language yes III-DEM IIIDEM 1  
*man-wern*  
 III-many  
 ‘That’s my language, . . . . that’s what it’s like. There are  
 many (of expressions).’
- 10 *yi-njordohbolhme-rr-imen ba yi-bayid-yu-yu-n*,  
 2-fuck-RR-IMP so 2-INTERJ-REDUP-lie-IMP  
*ngarri-yime*  
 1a-sayNP  
 [everyone laughs]  
 ‘“[you kangaroos] go screw and sleep and” we would say  
 [everyone laughs]’
- 11 *wanjh ka-njordohbolhme-rr-en ka-yo-yo ku-kirribel*,  
 SEQ 3-copulate-RR-IMP 3-REDUP-lie LOC-wet.place  
*labud, nabolhnadjirde*.  
 prop.n. prop.n.

- ‘and then then they would go and screw on the wet ground, the agile wallaby.’
- 12 *Yi-bayid-djirde-bolhme-rr-en yarri-yime.*  
2-INTERJ-?[wallaby]-stamp-RR-IMP 1a-say  
‘“You kangaroos go and bayid-screw” . . . . . we say.’
- 13 MG: *Kornobolo na-kka?*  
prop.n. I-DEM  
‘That’s the agile wallaby is it?’
- 14 NK: *Yo labud.*  
yes prop.n.  
‘Yes the agile wallaby [uses patrillect term]’
- 15 MG: *Labud?*  
prop.n.  
‘[you call it] labud?’
- 16 NK: *Yo Kun-dedjwarre ngad ngarri-bayid-wokdi nga-yime.*  
yes IV-prop.n. 1aPOSS 1a-INTERJ-speak 1-sayNP  
‘Yes, that’s what we bayid-call it in Kundedjwarre’
- 17 *Nga-bayid-buykahme nguddangke Bulanj. Ya.*  
1-INTERJ-do.differentlyNP 2POSS prop.n. yes  
‘I’m bayid-speaking a different way to you [by using the word bayid] Bulanj, yeah.’

In this extract the main speaker NK uses her Kundedjwarre patrillect for illustrative purposes. The expression referring to agile wallabies being hunted contains at least one name in Kundedjwarre for the agile wallaby, which, as we saw in Table 2, is a direct borrowing from a neighboring language to the south, Dalabon. The verbal expressions *-njordohbolhmerren* and *-bayiddjirdebolhmerren* seem to contain formative parts of the Kundedjwarre name for the agile wallaby *nabolhmadjirde*, but I had at the time of this conversation no idea of the meaning. The others present seemed to have no similar difficulty, judging by the laughter (line 10). The speaker seemed to be deriving great pleasure, indeed pride in being different (as well as humorous) and showing off this difference as entertainment for her audience of grandchildren — *nga-bayidbuykahme* ‘I’m bayid-speaking to you differently’. This kind of lexical innovation was almost certainly at some point in the language’s history deliberately created. It is part of the local communicative practice that each clan should have its own way of speaking and that such differences are to be encouraged, as our speaker in line 10 does with her audience.

## 6. Concluding comments

In the European tradition, the concept of *Ausbau* has proved very useful in describing the process whereby one language variety out of a group of other closely related varieties can be intentionally built up to emerge as a regional or national standard. In the case of clan lect systems in Aboriginal Australia, by contrast, the elaboration applies to all varieties in order to further the degree of *Abstand* among them and produce for each sociolinguistic group a very distinct identity. The resulting distinction of each variety is motivated by a variety of social and cultural factors. Consider the following definition of an “*Ausbau* language” by Trudgill (2004: 8) made in the context of European nation-state *Ausbau* sociolinguistics:

*Ausbau* languages, on the other hand, can be called in English ‘languages by extension, or construction’. An *Ausbau* language is a linguistic variety which is regarded as a distinct language for political, cultural, social and historical as well as linguistic reasons. *Ausbau* languages depend on cultural factors for their status because they are associated with geographical dialect continua.

The definition also seems to apply well enough to the situation we have discussed for *Kun-dangwok* in the Bininj Kun-wok dialect chain despite a totally different context. As we have seen, Aboriginal people regard their own lectal variety “as a distinct language” despite the often identical grammars of other neighboring varieties. It is these very small lexical differences that provide this distinction for “political, cultural, and social” reasons.

The attitudes and decisions speakers make about language usage may or may not have immediate effects. The instigation of the *Kun-dangwok* system may have been a gradual process, but at certain points in time it required very deliberate decisions about lexical elaboration. Sutton gives the example on Cape York of a speaker of a particular clan lect changing the lectal label from one of the two main contrast sets meaning ‘language-mine’ to the other set ‘language-go’ for political reasons involving a dispute with members of a nearby clan.<sup>16</sup> This realigned “the semantic frame of her clan’s language title” bringing her into an identification with members of her mother’s clan, whose clan lect label was also in the “‘language-go’ contrast set” (Sutton 1991: 59). Although this does not involve the kind of lexical elaboration that the instigation of the *Kun-dangwok* system would have required, it is still a clear example of a form of *Ausbau* in a polity where powerful individuals can have significant effects on the construction of a language and language identity.



In a highly relevant article on the role of culture and structuration in the languages of Australia, Evans (2003b) discusses the adaptation of linguistic structures in line with cultural selection and linguistic ideology in a kind of reverse Whorfian thesis. Among numerous illustrations from Australian languages, Evans examines the systematization of lectal variants under the influence of linguistic ideology, largely via unintended outcomes of intentional communicative acts. In the historical development of clan lect varieties, it is difficult to know just what aspects of the structure of the *Kun-dangwok* system are unintended outcomes. Certainly, beyond the usual contexts of *Kun-dangwok* use such as those illustrated here, I have also heard examples of *Kun-dangwok* interjections “leaking” into new contexts not within the domain of usual usage such as the “small amount of food” example above. In another case, a man belonging to the Bolmo clan was known for his frequent use of his *Kun-dangwok* interjection *ngabbarna*, or *barna*. A *Kun-dangwok* expression he constantly used *Kek barna!* ‘Oh, I see, how interesting!’ started to be used by a large number of younger people (from any clan) for humorous effect.<sup>17</sup> On a number of remote outstation communities on the Arnhem Land plateau, the expression has lost its original indexical function and now become part of ordinary usage, and as such this perhaps represents an unintended outcome of traditional *Kun-dangwok* usage.

Further development or elaboration of the *Kun-dangwok* system is probably unlikely given the disappearance of the original social context in which the system developed. Movement of the vast majority of the Bininj Kun-wok speech community away from the Arnhem Land plateau into larger Arnhem Land settlements such as Kunbarlanja and Maningrida has largely made the use of clan lect varieties obsolete or restricted to use on small remote outstation communities. More familiar *Ausbau* processes are likely to become relevant for the dwindling numbers of viable Aboriginal languages. These processes will continue to be highly localized in their effects and most likely related to the influences of ongoing vernacular literacy programs, dictionary projects, bilingual education, language revitalization, and interpreting and translation services.

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## Notes

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1. The spelling of the name of this language is in itself an interesting case of *Ausbau*. There are three different orthographies employed for the one language; one for Gun-djeihmi dialect, another for Manyallaluk Mayali, and a third (“Standard Kunwinjku Orthography”) for the rest. There is no voiced/unvoiced distinction for stops and thus for the velar stop either the letter “g” or “k” is needed. However, in Gun-djeihmi, speakers (who live in Kakadu National Park) chose to use “g” syllable-initially and “k” in syllable-final positions (Kunwinjku dialect only uses “k”). This was done in order to distance themselves from their Kunwinjku Arnhem Land neighbors who have a different history perceived as being closely connected to the Anglican mission, while Gun-djeihmi people see themselves as the descendants of buffalo shooters. As a result, the language name is spelled “Bininj Gun-wok” using the Gun-djeihmi orthography but “Bininj Kun-wok” using the Kunwinjku orthography.
2. These are mostly registers related to kinship such as the so-called mother-in-law registers (Dixon 1972, 1990; Haviland 1979; Harris 1970; Rumsey 1982; McConvell 1982; Laughren 2001), joking relationship registers or “ways of speaking,” and special registers used in ritual and ceremony such as the Damin register of the Lardil language (Nash and Hale 1997).
3. I say “largely nonexistent” because higher ordinate terms are sometimes used to label a group of languages spoken by a neighboring *Sprachbund*. For example, Bininj Kun-wok speakers use the term *Malarrk* to refer to the many languages spoken by the Yolngu people to their east, but this is nevertheless still not a term for a dialect chain.
4. Bininj Kun-wok is a polysynthetic non-Pama-Nyungan language and member of the Gunwinjguan language family. It features a four-gender system and the verbal complex allows incorporation of pronominal, adverbial, directional, benefactive, and nominal elements, as well as other verbal inflections that mark tense, aspect, and mood (see Evans 2003a).
5. In this variation, the noun-class prefix *kun-* is dropped and a third-person-possessor suffix *-no* is added.
6. This includes the Gunwinjguan family languages of Bininj Kunwok, Dalabon, Rembarrnga, and possibly Jawoyn.
7. This borrowing applies to some nouns but not to the emblematic *Kun-dangwok* interjections, which seem to be genuine lexical innovations.
8. This situation has also been documented in the “patrillects” of western Cape York; see Johnson (1991: 213).
9. In Arnhem Land cosmology, the world is divided into moieties and, for western Arnhem Land at least, this includes matrilineal as well as patrilineal moieties. Land, plants, animals, weather, humans, the cosmos, and certain physical and spiritual phenomena are all affiliated with a moiety. The patrilineal moieties in Bininj Kun-wok are named *duwa* and *yirridjja*.
10. In metalinguistic contexts, the verbal prefixes can be cited as nouns with a third-person-possessor suffix *-no* (thus *-bayid-* > *bayidno*, *-walih-* > *walihno*). Note also that in this particular clan the formative *-wali(h)* appears in both nominal and verbal prefix forms.
11. I, II, III, IV = noun class, REL = relative, 1, 2, 3 = person, a = augmented, 12/3 = first-person dual inclusive subject acting on third-person object, IMM = immediate, NP = non-past, prop.n. = proper noun, pers.n. = personal name, SEQ = sequential, MMB = mother’s mother’s brother, Z = sister, D = daughter, C = child, LOC = locative, STAT = stative, IMP = imperative, INTERJ. = interjection, RR = reflexive/reciprocal, CONJ = conjunction, IGN = ignorative, DEM = demonstrative, POSS = possessive.

12. The different dialects of BK have different rules for iterative reduplication forms of the verb. The form used here in the Kuninjku dialect as part of *Kun-dangwok* discourse actually resembles the neighboring Kune dialect iterative reduplication rule of doubling the first CV of the root form.
13. This is not the only context where clan lect terms are used. Evans (1992) also describes the use of another system of clan-specific lexemes known as *yigurrumu*, which are used as “*gesundheit* interjections,” i.e., they are used in response to a person sneezing.
14. Using the formula *kun-* ‘language noun-class prefix’ + *Kun-dangwok* interjection + archaic delocutive verb theme (the latter being formative in a number of dialect labels such as Kun-dedjnjenghmi, Kun-djeyhmi, and Kun-dangyohmi).
15. The term *ngulamanjmak* ‘tomorrow’ used here is an unusual form that contributes to the markedness of the speech. The usual word for “tomorrow” in the Kuninjku dialect of this speaker is *malayi* or *ngulam*.
16. As Sutton (2001: 457) explains, “In the Wik region the speech variety allotted to [a] clan at the foundation of the world was typically known as ‘Wik X’ (in the south, ‘Kugu X’), X being in each case the name of a principal totem of the clan, but these are descriptive phrases rather than proper names as such.” Also, “The language names Wik-Me’anh, Wik-Keyangan, Wik-Iinychany, Wik-Iiyanh, Kugu-Muminh, Kugu-Uwanh, Kugu-Mu’inh and several others may all be translated as ‘language-go’ in the respective languages. Similarly, Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan both mean ‘language-mine’” (Sutton 1991: 57, 59).
17. Normally, the ordinary term is just *Kek!* ‘I see, how interesting!’ In this case, the *Kun-dangwok* interjection *barna* has been added in post-position. Nicholas Evans (p.c.) states that he also heard the use of this form *kekbarna* in the late 1980s.

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