COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC STUDIES IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS 4

# The Language of Emotions

## *The case of Dalabon (Australia)*

Maïa Ponsonnet

John Benjamins Publishing Company

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## The case of Dalabon (Australia)

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# The Language of Emotions

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The Language of Emotions. The case of Dalabon (Australia)
by Maïa Ponsonnet

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*To Dalabon speakers.*

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# Preface

This volume documents and analyzes the linguistic devices available to the speakers of the Dalabon language, a severely endangered Australian language, to express and describe emotions, assessing how these devices relate to local representations and practices about emotions. The study is based on first hand data collected between 2007 and 2012 in south-western Arnhem Land (Northern Territory), where Dalabon is spoken.

Chapter 1 sets the theoretical framework; Chapters 2 and 3 the ethnographic and linguistic backgrounds respectively. Chapter 4 presents expressive emotional devices, which include diminutives, interjections, and various prosodic features. Expressive features are prominent in terms of frequency, and relate to culturally central categories such as compassion.

Nevertheless, descriptive emotional features also play an important part. The emotion lexicon is large: at least 160 emotional lexemes, most of them adjectives or verbs. A lot of these lexemes are morphologically compound, often involving a body-part noun. Having discussed the morphology and syntax of emotion words in Chapter 5, and their semantics in Chapter 6, Chapters 7 to 11 examine the roles played by body-part nouns in the Dalabon emotion lexicon.

Like most languages in the world (and like many Australian languages) Dalabon uses metaphors grounded in physical and physiological metonymies in order to describe emotions. The linguistic and conceptual status of these tropes is discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 presents Dalabon emotion metonymies and metaphors related to the body. One of the particularities of Dalabon metaphors of emotions is that in spite of their metaphorical dimension, they remain partly metonymic to the extent that they always represent emotions as states or parts of the person, not as independent entities. As a result, emotions are never represented as forces or opponents. In Dalabon, a metaphor like 'overwhelmed by love' for instance, is impossible. Explaining this limitation is a goal for future cross-linguistic research. Chapter 9 presents emotion metaphors that do not involve body-related nouns, in particular metaphors for anger. These metaphors come closer to representing emotions as independent entities – although such representations remain marginal.

Chapter 10 adopts an alternative perspective on Dalabon emotional compounds, and shows that metonymies and metaphors are not the only things body-part nouns 'do' in the Dalabon emotion lexicon. While nouns denoting abdominal body-parts endorse a figurative dimension, nouns denoting visible body-parts are used to specify which parts of the person are involved in emotional behaviors. For instance, it is

possible to use a compound to say that someone is 'angry from the hands', when someone is gesticulating in anger. Here, the body-part noun serves a descriptive, rather than figurative function. Such compounds rely on analogy and compositionality, with metonymies and metaphors playing minor roles in their production. In fact, analogy and compositionality produce compounds which, in turn, may suggest new metaphors to the speakers.

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# Abbreviations and conventions

## Abbreviations used in interlinear glosses

| | |
|---|---|
| ABL: | ablative case |
| APPR: | apprehensive mood |
| ASSOC: | associative case |
| BEN: | benefactive |
| COM: | comitative |
| CONJ: | conjonction |
| CSTVZR: | causativizer |
| DAT: | dative case |
| DEM: | demonstrative |
| DET: | determiner |
| DIM: | diminutive |
| du: | dual |
| DYAD: | dyadic suffix |
| dys: | dysharmonic |
| EFF: | effective |
| EMPH: | emphasizer |
| ERG: | ergative case |
| excl: | exclusive |
| FEM: | feminine |
| FILL: | morphological filler |
| FOC: | focus prefix |
| FUT: | future tense |
| GEN: | genitive case |
| h: | high(er) on scale of animacy |
| HESIT: | hesitation |
| INCH: | inchoative marker |
| incl: | inclusive |
| INST: | instrumental case |
| INTERR: | interrogative |
| INTJ: | interjection |
| IRR: | irrealis mood |
| LIM: | limitative particle |
| LOC: | locative case |
| MASC: | masculine prefix |
| NEG: | negation |
| NOM: | nominative case |
| NPST: | non-past tense |
| ONOMAT: | onomatopoeia |
| PART: | particle |
| PCUST: | customary past |
| PI: | past imperfective |
| pl: | plural |
| POSS: | possessive |
| PP: | past perfective |
| PR: | present tense |
| PRIV: | privative suffix |
| PST: | past tense |
| PURP: | purposive mood |
| R: | realis mood |
| REDUP: | reduplication |
| RR: | reflexive/reciprocal |
| SEQ: | sequential |
| sg: | singular |
| SUB: | subordinate marker |
| TIME: | time case marker |
| TR: | transitive marker |
| VBLZR: | verbalizer |

## Speakers' initials

| | |
|---|---|
| JW | Jimmy Wesan |
| LB | Lily Bennett |
| MT | Maggie Tukumba |
| ND | Nikipini Dalak |
| PA | Philip Ashley |
| QB | Queenie Brennan |

## Data types

| | |
|---|---|
| [ContEl] | contextualized elicitation |
| [ConvEl] | conversation in the course of elicitation |
| [DD] | Dalabon Dictionary |
| [El] | standard elicitation |
| [Narr] | narratives |
| [RPF] | comment on *Rabbit-Proof Fence* |
| [Sc] | cultural script |
| [SD] | comment on *Samson and Delilah* |
| [Stim] | response to elicitation stimuli |
| [TC] | comment on *Ten Canoes* |
| [Tr] | comment in the course of translation |

## Other abbreviations

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ANIM | animate | M | mother |
| B | brother | NMNLZR | nominalizer |
| BP | body-part | PA | part-of-animate noun |
| D | daughter | PI | part-of-inanimate noun |
| EXP | experiencer | RECIP | reciprocal |
| F | father | REDUP | reduplicated form |
| GEN | generic noun | REFL | reflexive |
| INAN | inanimate | S | son |
| INST | instrument | THMTC | thematics |
| KIN | kin-terms | Z | sister |

# Recordings

In the following paragraphs:

'####' are meaningless file numbers.
'SS' means speakers' initials.
'annot' means the annotation number in ELAN (transcription softeware).
The 'data type' is indicative of the context in which the data was collected (see abbreviations above.)

**Data collected in 2007 and 2008:**

30024/2007 – 14′ (JW) [ContEl]
####/yyyy – min (SS) [data.type]

These recordings have not been transcribed under ELAN.
The minute reading indicates where the segment is located in the recording.
These files are archived with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies, Canberra, audio-visual archives:
http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/ava.html

**Data collected in 2009:**

270909_93OK 0400 (LB) [ContEl]
ddmmyy_#### annot (SS) [data.type]

These recordings have been transcribed under ELAN.
They are archived with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies, Canberra, audio-visual archives:
http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/ava.html

**Data collected between 2010 and 2013:**

20110613_002_ND_LB 027 (LB) [Stim]
yyyymmdd_###_SS_SS annot (SS) [data.type]

These recordings have been transcribed under ELAN.
They are archived with ELAR, the Endangered Languages Archive (Endangered Languages Documentation Program, hosted by the School of Oriental and African Studies, London):
http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/ponsonnet2012dalabon

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