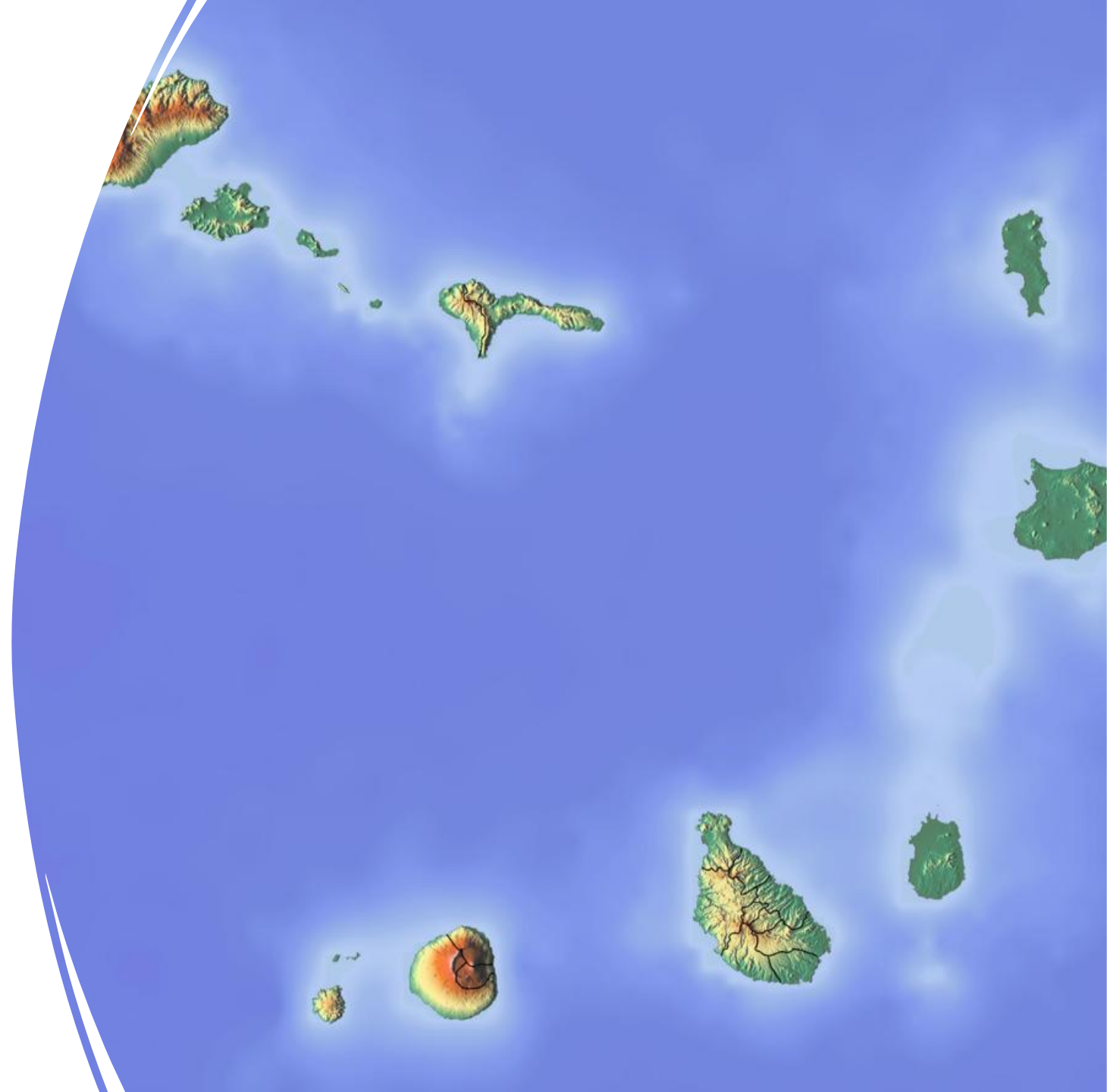


Conceptualising and Categorising the Body in Kriolu (Cape Verdean Creole)

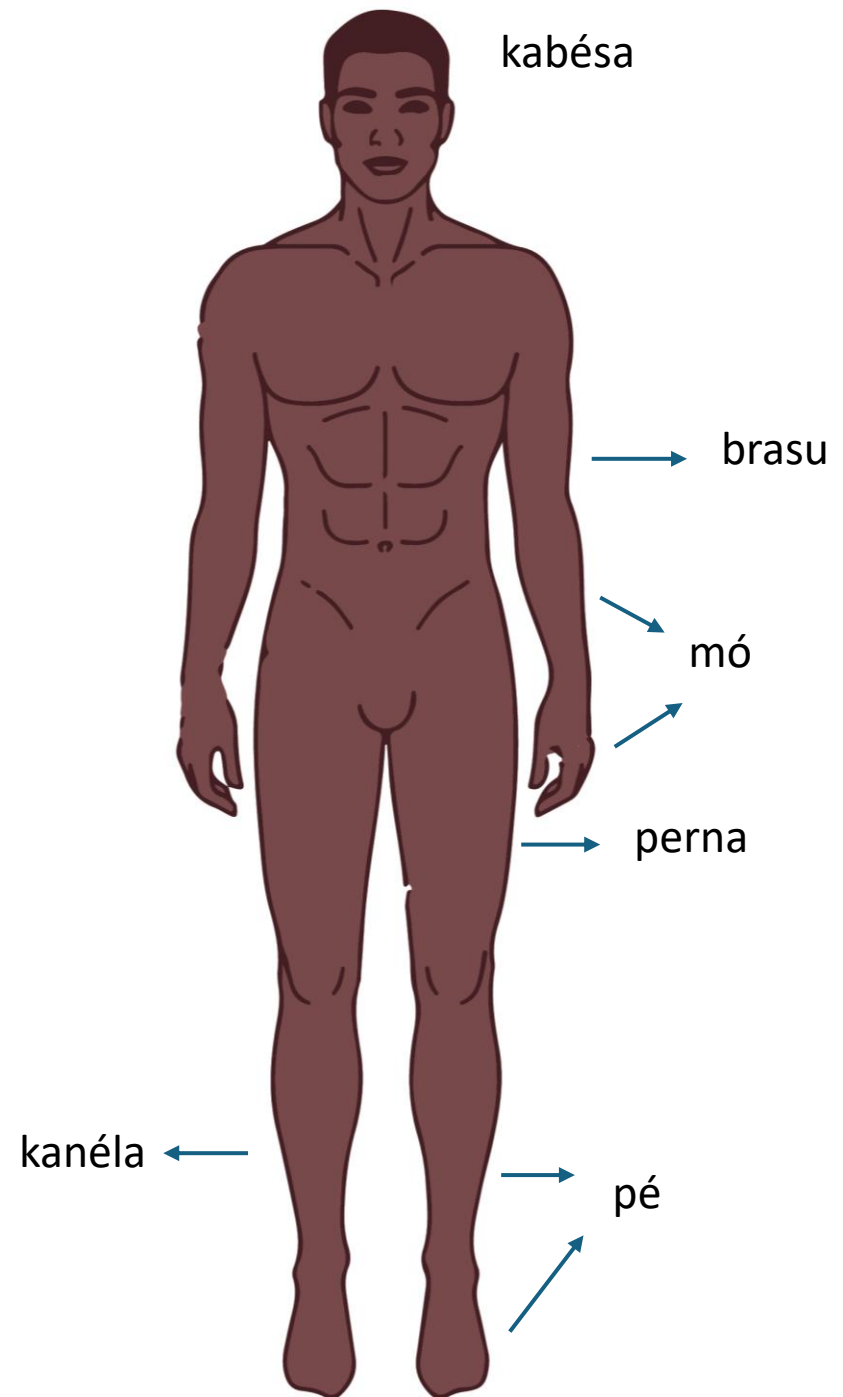
Rebecca Arkell

PhD Candidate at Georg-
August Universität
Gottingen



Body part semantics

- As a universal aspect of human experience, the human body offers a key resource to explore how we form and organise categories.
- Cross-linguistically, languages vary in how they segment, conceptualise and name the body (Enfield et al., 2006)
- The body cross-linguistically serves as a source domain for target concepts in a variety of other domains (e.g. emotions, space).
- **Are body parts categorised based on perception (vision, proprioception) or functionality?**



Cultural- Cognitive Linguistics Lens

- African and Euro-American cultural sensorium models differ in how they structure perception and emotion (Geurts, 2002a, b; Stoller, 1989).
- Euro-American models tend to treat states of perception, affect, and disposition as independent categories, many African cultures merge these domains into one single conceptual category (Ameka & Amha, 2022).
- Presence or absence of specific body part terms is often linked to their cultural significance, as the body plays functional and symbolic roles in people's customs and behaviours (Kraska-Szlenk, 2020)



Research Questions

1. How do Kriolu speakers categorise and conceptualise the body?
2. What does lexical and conceptual variation across Kriolu speakers tell us about processes of language change?

Kabuverdi: Sociolinguistic and Historical Context

- An archipelago 450km off West Africa comprising 10 islands
- Populated because of historical coexistence between Portuguese slave traders with African enslaved people (1455)
- Two main linguistic areas: Northern (*Barlavento*) and Southern islands (*Sotavento*)



Santiago Island: Badiu variety

- Culturally and linguistically considered to be the most “African”
- High intra-island linguistic variation: roughly three dialectal areas.



Kriolu (Kabuverdianu)

- Oldest living creole and most widely spoken Portuguese-related Creole (approx. 920.000 speakers worldwide)

superstrate

Portuguese

+

substrate

Niger-Congo languages

(Wolof, Temne, Mandinka)

Linguistic continuum Kriolu-Portuguese



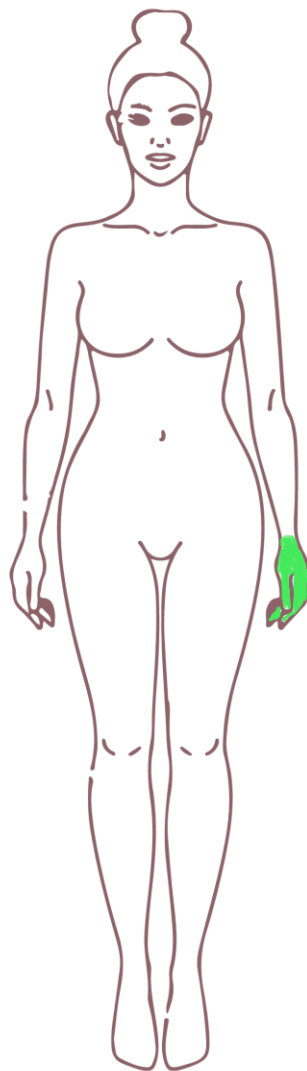
- A post-creole continuum (De Camp, 1971): a sociolinguistic situation in which multiple overlapping varieties of a creole exist ranging from basilectal to acrolectal.
- Current trend: loss of basilectal features (Trajano, 2018)
- Diglossic relationship with Portuguese

Methodology

- 10 colouring elicited tasks - adapted from van Staden & Majid's (2006) body colouring task
- 13 semi-structured interviews - following Enfield's (2006) Elicitation guide on parts of the body
- Participant observation
- First fieldwork trip: 5 weeks on Santiago Island.

The linguistic conceptualisation of *mó* and *pé*

1. Where does *mó* extend until?



2. Where does *pé* extend until?

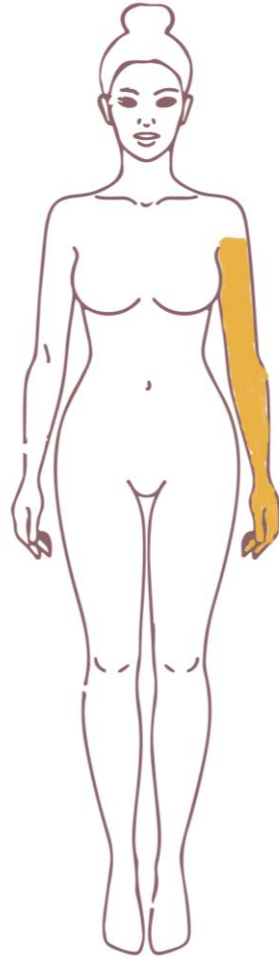


The linguistic conceptualisation of *mó* and *pé*

N kebra mó

I broke hand/arm

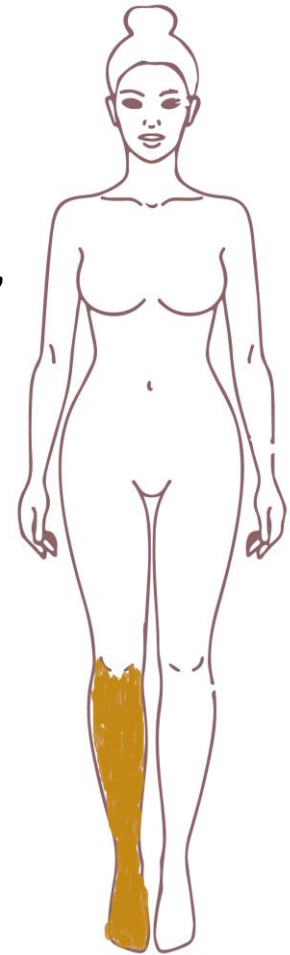
“I broke my hand/arm”



N kebra pé

I broke foot/leg

“I broke my foot/leg”



Mó

Hand/Arm

“Mó ta comensa di li pa li (di ombru pa mó), ma kada um tem si parti: ombru, brasu, mó, palmu di mó, kosta di mó”

“Mó starts from the shoulder to the hand, but every part has its name: shoulder, arm, arm/hand (touching forearm), palm of the hand, back of the hand”

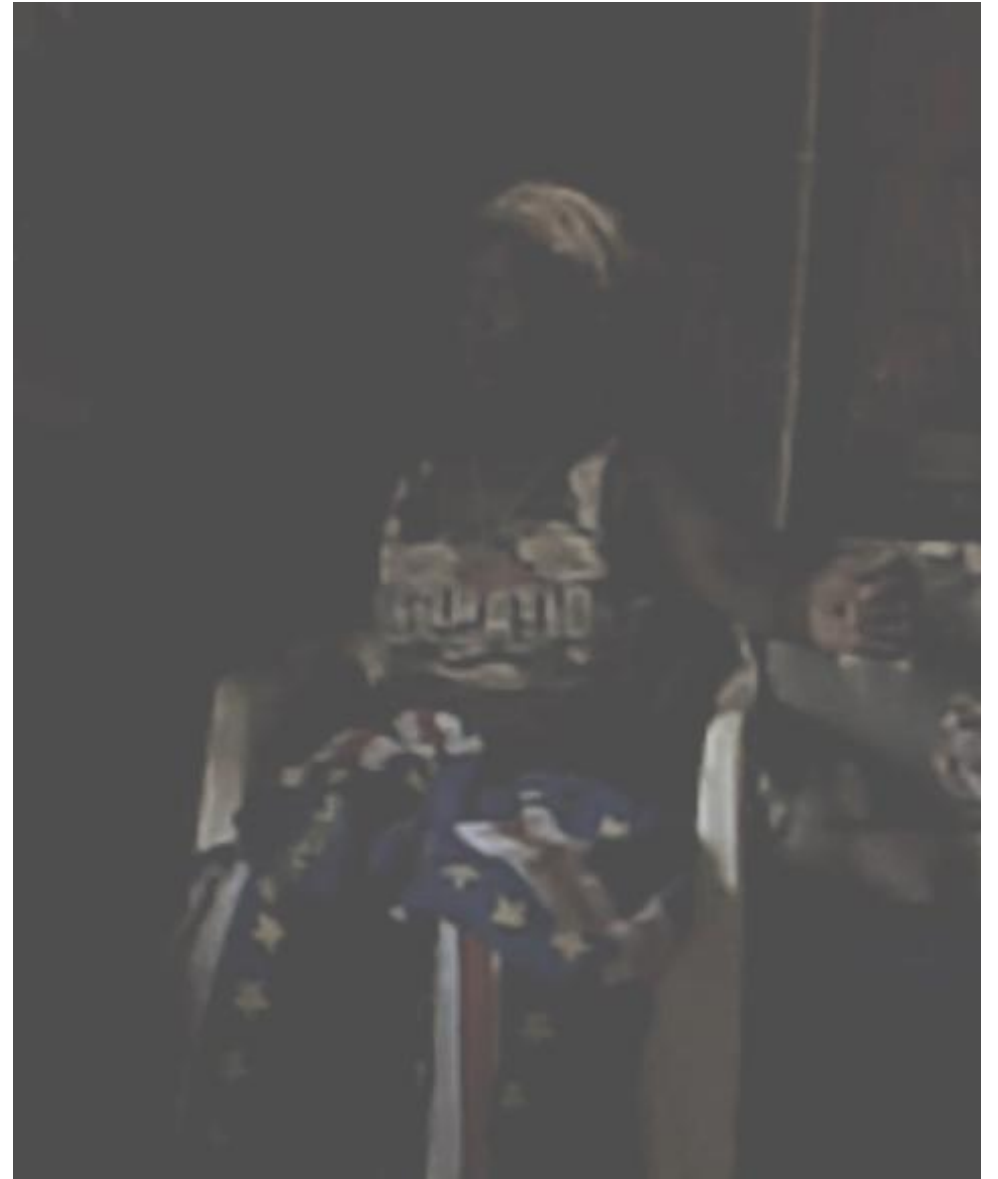
Variation:

- some speakers do not accept *mó* to refer to the arm too
- There is variation in the extension of *mó* (hand only, hand and forearm, hand and whole arm)
- some speakers start by “older people say” or “in Kriolu we say” when they tell me *mó* can be used for the whole (or part of the) upper limb

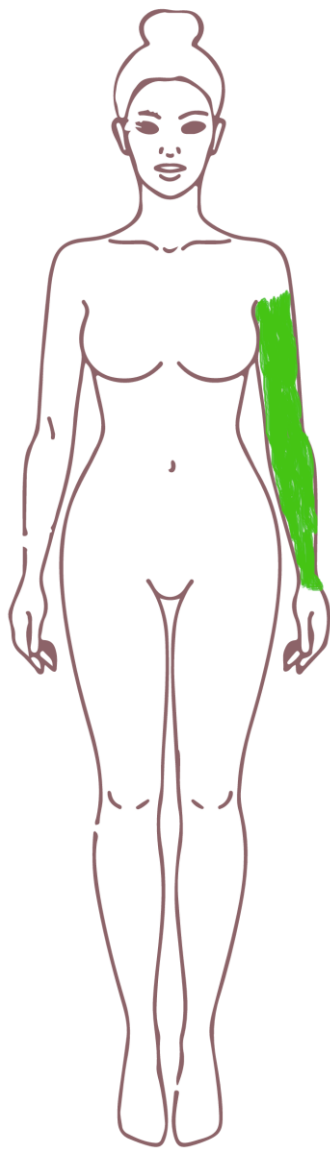
During elicitation sessions,
some speakers provide
conflicting categorisations:

*“Keli é ombru, keli é mó...brasu.
Ombru, brasu, mó. Kel mó li é ligadu
korpu interu.”*

“This is the shoulder, this is
mó...brasu (arm). Shoulder,
arm, hand. This hand is tied to
the whole body.”



Speaker opens up her whole arms in front of her
when she shows me *mó*



Brasu

- For most speakers, *brasu* refers to the arm (excluding the shoulder and hand)
- Some speakers conceptualise *brasu* as part of *mó*
- Others conceptualise *mó* and *brasu* to refer to distinct areas, similarly to 'hand' and 'arm' in English




Pé Foot/Leg

“Ali é perna, ali é pé, ali também é pé mesmu. So ki li é patta’l pé, karkanhada, odju’l pé, bariga’l pé”

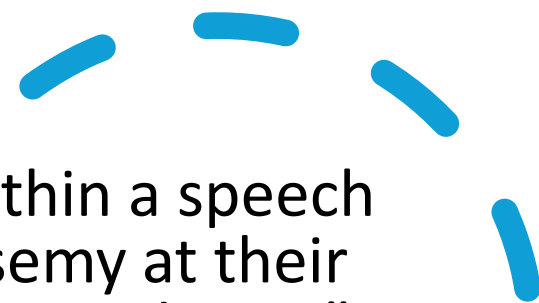
“This is the thigh, this is *pé* (as he touches his shin), this is also *pé*. It’s just that here it is the top of the foot, the heel, the eye of the foot (malleoli), the sole of the foot”

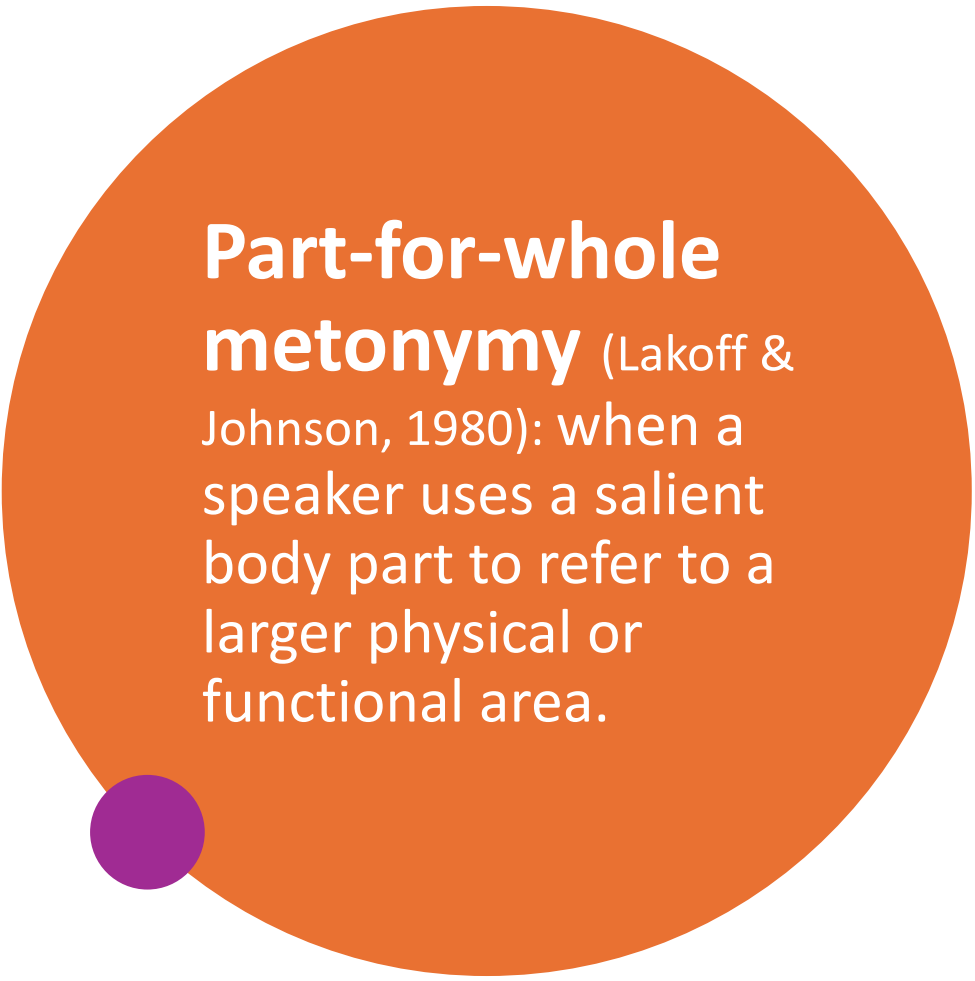
Variation:

- some speakers do not accept *pé* to include the lower leg too
- 



Polysemy and Variation

- 
- “All semantic changes within a speech community involve polysemy at their beginning point or at their endpoint” (Wilkins, 1996)
 - “Speakers show variation and differences in their access to and internalisation of their community’s cultural cognition. Also, cultural cognition is dynamic in that it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated across generations and through contact between speech communities” (Sharifian, 2017)



**Part-for-whole
metonymy** (Lakoff &
Johnson, 1980): when a
speaker uses a salient
body part to refer to a
larger physical or
functional area.



Why? (Hypotheses)

- **Salience:** The part is more perceptually or functionally salient than the whole (e.g., the hand over the entire arm).
- **Functionality:** The part and the whole often work together — hands grasp but so do forearms.
- **Cultural Model:** Some cultures prioritise activity or utility over anatomy in conceptualising the body.

What happens in the superstrate and substrates?

- **Lexifier:**

- Portuguese: *mão/braço* (hand/arm) and *pé/perna* (foot/leg)

- **Substrates:**

- Wolof: *loxo* (arm + hand) and *tank* (leg + foot)

- Temne: *kata/anlonk* (hand/arm) and *akatək/anlənək* (foot/leg)

- Mandinka: *buloo/bulutuwolu* (hand/arm) and *sinjamboo/sinkaloo* (foot/leg)

(data gathered from *Multilingual Resources for Primary Schools in The Gambia*)

Examples of lexical coexistence

- *Barbéla/kexu*: chin
- *Piskos/ katchu*: neck
- *Oredja/obidu*: ear
- *Kapus/pistana*: eyebrow
- *Pulsu/kanu mó/txabi mó*: wrist
- *Bariga'l pé/sola'l pé*: sole of the foot
- *Stomagu/stángu/bandóba*: stomach

The coexistence of multiple lexemes and overlapping semantic zones reflects a typical creole process: rapid, dynamic internal change (Mufwene, 2001; Trajano, 2018)

Semantic change from lexifier language

Semantic narrowing: a lexeme comes to refer to a more specific concept than it did in the lexifier language.

- E.g., in Portuguese *perna* indicates the whole leg, in Kriolu it indicates the thigh only.

Semantic drift: the lexeme retains its form but shifts to a different adjacent concept in the semantic field.

Portuguese lexeme	Kriolu lexeme	Referents
<i>coxa</i>	<i>koxa</i>	'Thigh' → 'hips'
<i>pestana</i>	<i>pistana</i>	'Eye lashes' → 'eyebrows'

Semantic shift 'thigh' -> 'hips'

- Functional and cultural salience: words may shift meaning to fit functionally relevant or culturally salient parts of the body (e.g. areas involved in dancing)
- Batuku: a traditional dance from the island of Santiago where women wear a cloth around their waist

e.g. **Rabida** **koxa!**

To flip the hips

"dance (batuku)!"



Concluding remarks

- Similarly to what was found for Northern Australian Kriol, **lexical forms may persist while conceptual boundaries shift** (Ponsonnet, 2017).
- Conflicting conceptualisations of body parts point to **ongoing language change**. Further investigation is needed to assess whether the shift towards the acrolect can be attested for body part semantics and its extensions.
- Variation in the categorisation and conceptualisation of *mó* and *pé* among Kriolu speakers points to multilayered cultural-cognitive patterns.

Next steps

Future work will explore:

1. Whether variation in body part naming and categorisation is shaped by:
 - Contextual framing (e.g., label vs. action phrase)
 - Sociolinguistic factors, including generational and diatopic variables
 - Integrating a focus on co-speech gestures as part of the communicative act creating meaning.
- 2. The role of the substrate languages in the conceptualisation of the body in Kriolu
- 3. Semantic extensions: emotions and/or the conceptualisation of inner organs.

Reference list

- **Ameka, F. K., & Amha, A. (2022).** Research on language and culture in Africa. In *Approaches to Language and Culture* (pp. 339–383). De Gruyter
- **Corum, M. (2021).** *Conceptual Construal, Convergence and the Creole Lexicon*. In *Creoles, Revisited* (pp. 185–204). Routledge.
- **De Camp D. (1971).** Toward a generative analysis of a post-creole speech continuum. *Pidginization and creolization of languages*. 347–70.
- **Enfield, N. J. (2006).** Elicitation guide on parts of the body. *Language Sciences*, 28(2–3), 148–157.
- **Enfield, N. J., Majid, A., & van Staden, M. (2006).** Cross-linguistic categorisation of the body: Introduction. *Language Sciences*, 28(2–3), 137–147.
- **Geurts, K. L. (2002a).** Culture and the senses. Bodily ways of knowing in an African community. University of California Press.
- **Kraska-Szlenk, I. (2020).** Body part terms in conceptualization and language usage.
- **Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980).** The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive science*, 4(2), 195–208.
- **Luís, A. (2018).** Morphological theory and creole languages.
- **Mufwene, S. S. (2001).** *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- **Ponsonnet, M. (2017).** Conceptual representations and figurative language in language shift: Metaphors and gestures for emotions in Kriol (Barunga, northern Australia). *Cognitive Linguistics*, 28(4), 631–671.
- **Tjuka, A. (2024).** Objects as human bodies: cross-linguistic colexifications between words for body parts and objects. *Linguistic Typology*, 28(3), 379–418.
- **Trajano, F. (2018).** Influence and Borrowing: reflections on decreolization and pidginization of cultures and societies. In: *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity*. BRILL; p. 334–59.
- **Sharifian, F. (2017).** Cultural linguistics: The state of the art. *Advances in cultural linguistics*, 1–28.
- **Stoller, P. (1989).** *Fusion of the worlds. An ethnography of possession among the Songhay of Niger*. University of Chicago Press.
- **van Staden, M., & Majid, A. (2006).** Body colouring task. *Language Sciences*, 28(2–3), 158–161.
- **Wilkins, David P. (1996)** Semantic change and the search for cognates. In Mark Durie & Malcolm D. Ross (eds.), *The comparative method reviewed: Regularity and irregularity in language change*, 264–304. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The background is a dark teal color, densely populated with numerous speech bubbles of various colors including red, yellow, purple, and grey. Each speech bubble contains a large, dark blue question mark. The bubbles are scattered across the entire frame, creating a pattern that suggests a continuous stream of questions or inquiries.

Obrigada!

Questions, comments, suggestions?