

The acquisition of ergative marking in Kaluli, Ku Waru and Duna (Trans New Guinea)

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(to be presented by Alan Rumsey)

Abstract

Based on research by the three authors and a joint forthcoming publication by them, Rumsey will present material on the acquisition of ergative marking on noun phrases in three languages of Papua New Guinea: Kaluli, Ku Waru, and Duna. The expression of ergativity in all the languages is broadly similar, but sensitive to language-specific features, and this pattern of similarity and difference is reflected in the available acquisition data. Children acquire adult-like ergative marking at about the same pace, reaching similar levels of mastery by the age of three, despite considerable differences in morphological complexity of ergative marking among the languages. What may be more important—as a factor in accounting for the relative uniformity of acquisition in this respect—are the similarities in patterns of interactional scaffolding that emerge from a comparison of the three cases.