

Multi-word verbal constructions in Papuan (Ku Waru) and Flexibility

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This paper is broadly concerned with the nature and universality of word classes and their relation to syntagmatic types. To explore these wider issues, we make use of child language acquisition data from a Papuan language, Ku Waru, of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, to examine the acquisition of word classes and clause-level syntactic structures, and to draw some comparatively useable conclusions about these. In particular, the paper examines the frequency and development in children's acquisition of two distinct multi-word verbal constructions: the adjunct+verb construction and the serial verb construction. The paper considers these structures and processes of their acquisition from two points of view: that of the adult target language towards which children's proficiency is developing; and that of children's speech at various points from 17 to about 36 months, considered as emergent and evolving systems in their own right.