

Verb Serialization, Language Acquisition and Polycategoriality

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This paper is an analysis of language acquisition data from an area of the Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, and the large (Melpa) dialect continuum. Examination of material from the large corpus collected focuses on children between the ages of 16 months and 3 and one half years (with some comparative remarks on children up to the age of 6). The corpus has been collected over the past several years, largely by indigenous assistants in naturalistic evening household settings, often involving groups of adults and children. The focus of analysis is on the appearance of verbal constructions which, from an adult language point of view, may be described as Adjunct+Verb and serial verb constructions (with examination of the appearance of final and non-final inflection and other features). These phenomena show remarkable development in children between 2 and 3 years: This usage-based study of acquisition is linked with broader questions about the nature of verb serialization, and comparative questions about the emergence of a verbal category.