The acquisition of ergativity. Ed. by Edith Bavin and Sabine Stoll. (Trends in language acquisition research 9.) Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013. Pp. 341. ISBN 9789027234797. $149 (Hb).

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This book is an important contribution to language documentation and to the understanding of child language acquisition. With the exception of one paper on Hindi, small languages are the focus: Kurmanji Kurdish, Basque, Arctic Quebec Inuktitut, three Papuan languages (Kaluli, Ku Waru, and Duna), six Mayan languages (K'iche', Yukatek/Yucatec, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Mam, Q'anjob'al), one Australian language (Warlpiri), and one Tibeto-Burman language (Chintang). The numbers of speakers range from 15 million (Kurmanji Kurdish upper limit) to 2,000 (Kaluli).

The papers differ as to research questions, but with valuable overlap. Apart from the introduction and an initial paper on ergativity by Bernard Comrie, the papers follow a similar structure: the authors outline the grammatical systems of which ergativity is a part and discuss speech settings (language ecology, languages of education, and literacy) and data-collection methods. Then they present data relating to how (and whether) children acquire the ways of representing ergativity, and sometimes data regarding caregiver input. Most papers draw on small data sets, so authors are cautious in interpreting findings (e.g. the chapters by Jennifer Austin and by Bhuvana Narasimhan). Three papers compare acquisition of ergativity across three or four languages within a family or phylum (Mayan languages: Penelope Brown, Barbara Pfeiler, Lourdes de León, and Clifton Pye; Clifton Pye, Barbara Pfeiler, and Pedro Mateo Pedro; Papuan languages: Alan Rumsey, Lila San Roque, and Bambi Schieffelin).

Ergative marking relates to basic properties of sentence grammar: how speakers express who is doing what to whom, and how this relates to argument structures of predicates. The subject of an intransitive verb (S) and the object of a transitive verb (O) are aligned with absolutive marking, while the subject of a transitive verb (A) has ergative marking. Morphologically, this is expressed in three main ways: case marking on the participants (Warlpiri, Hindi, Kaluli, Ku Waru, and Duna), agreement with the participants on the main predicate (or an auxiliary) (Mayan languages), or using both case marking and predicate agreement (Basque, Chintang, Kurmanji Kurdish, Inuktitut).

Most authors provide some age-related data on how and when children acquire the ways of representing A, S, and O. By age two, Mayan children have mastered basic agreement; by age 2;1, a Hindi child provides ergative marking in the right contexts; and by age three, children are doing this for Warlpiri and the Papua New Guinea languages. But Chintang children show considerable variation in how they learn the ergative case. Comparisons are not easy because authors do not give comparable definitions of mastery.

Does the form of the ergative marking affect how children acquire it? Basque has ergative case and ergative agreement. Children do not produce them in tandem; some children omitted ergative case marking while producing ergative agreement, and others on occasion omitted ergative agreement. In some Mayan languages (Brown et al.), children developed absolutive subject and object agreement before ergative agreement.

Canonical ergative marking has a participant-level property and a proposition-level property: it marks off the most active participant ('agent') in a proposition with at least two participants. Languages vary as to the weight placed on these properties. If the participant-level property has less weight, then the subject of any transitive verb (A) has ergative case, regardless of how agentive. If agentivity matters, then, as in Warlpiri, the subjects of some two-argument verbs (e.g. verbs of speaking) have absolutive case. If the proposition-level property has weight, then no intransitive verb has an ergative subject. If it has less weight, then a subject may have ergative case, regardless of whether an object is present or implicit.

This leads to questions about how children understand the association of ergative with A. In Warlpiri undergeneralization of ergative to prototypically agentive A was not seen. Failure to mark A in the absence of an object was observed in Kaluli children, but depended on how semantically transitive the verb was. Overgeneralization was generally not attested. The Basque, Inuktitut, Warlpiri, and Kaluli children showed no overgeneralization of ergative marking to S (subjects of nonergative verbs). No overgeneralization of cross-reference markers by Mayan children was observed. Ku Waru children showed some overgeneralization to S, but Ku Waru allows ergative marking on the subjects of intransitive verbs of certain classes (Pye et al.'s 'extended ergativity'). In Ku Waru the first attestations of ergative case marking occur with the canonical subjects of transitive verbs, and the children only later start to use it on the noncanonical subjects of apparently monovalent framing verbs of speaking. The Kaluli children also overgeneralized the ergative to A arguments in word orders where ergative was pragmatically inappropriate.

Some languages have alternations whereby two-argument propositions may be expressed by transitive verbs with ergative subjects, or by verbs (sometimes with intransitive marking) with absolutive subjects. Chintang's intransitivizing construction is used when the object is nonspecific, and Sabine Stoll and Balthasar Bickel suggest this could be a challenge to learners. Inuktitut has similar alternations between transitive constructions and intransitive passive, antipassive, and noun incorporation constructions. Adults and children overwhelmingly use intransitive constructions to express two-argument propositions with third-person subjects. But if the subjects are first or second person, they use transitive constructions. Shanley Allen concludes that Inuktitut is moving away from morphological ergativity.

Sometimes systems split according to person and animacy: for example, in two sentences with the same verb, a nominal will have ergative case, but a first-person pronoun will have nominative case. Rumsey and colleagues observe 'no instances of Kaluli or Duna children incorrectly applying the regular nominal ergative marking to personal pronouns, suggesting that this differential marking is unproblematically acquired' (177). Despite Kaluli, Ku Waru, and Duna differing as to whether all nominals have the same ergative form or whether pronouns have different forms, children seem to have reached similar levels of mastery by age three.

Another type of split ergativity relates to tense and aspect. In Hindi, the A is marked differently depending on aspect: ergative if perfective, unmarked (nominative) if nonperfective. But, while ergative marking appears rarely in Hindi children's utterances, it is used appropriately, even at age 2;1. Children do not use it in nonperfective contexts and do not overextend it to objects or subjects of intransitive verbs. Errors include not producing it when required with perfective verbs. Kurmanji Kurdish has a split according to tense. It has strict subject (A/S)-object-verb order, but the forms of subject and object are reversed according to tense: in past-tense clauses, A is marked with an 'oblique' form, the O has the 'direct' form, and the verb agrees with O. In present-tense sentences, O has an oblique form, the subject (A) is direct, and the verb agrees with A. Caregivers show variable use of split ergative patterns: using the oblique = ergative variably with past tense, sometimes marking both arguments with the oblique form, and in the present tense using the less-marked direct forms for both A and O—thus losing case marking and relying on word order to distinguish grammatical function. Children showed no delay or difference in acquiring both the nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive systems. They used the variable patterns that their caregivers used, with similar frequency of use by age 2;6.

'Optional ergativity' often refers to ergative markers whose appearance is conditioned by more than one property—for example, appearing on Agents but only in situations of discourse prominence. This reduces the frequency of ergativity markers in the input. In the Papuan languages, for example, there was around 60% occurrence of ergative case in adult speech for bivalent propositions with an overt subject. Do children use it correctly from the start, or do they overgeneralize the marker to all agents, or do they overgeneralize it to arguments with the right discourse prominence? In Kaluli, ergative case marking interacts with focus and word order: ergative is obligatory on nominal agents in the pragmatically marked OAV order (which places discourse prominence on the A), but not in the unmarked AOV order, unless the object is high in animacy. Children begin using the ergative case-marker early, but not consistently, and they do overgener-

alize ergative marking from the OAV order to the AOV order (forty-one utterances produced). But they do not overgeneralize the ergative marker to personal pronouns (which have a separate form for focused pronouns).

'Morphological ergativity' (ergative case marking or ergative verb agreement) differs from 'syntactic ergativity'. The latter relates to properties such as control (which participants can be shared across multipredicate sentences) and quantification (which participants can be quantified). A puzzle that Allen notes for the child learning Arctic Quebec Inuktitut is how to learn that the nominals are marked on an ergative-absolutive pattern (morphological ergativity), but the syntax treats ergative and absolutive subjects in one way, and absolutive objects in a different way (a syntactic nominative-accusative system).

Major factors affecting acquisition discussed in this book include phonological and prosodic complexity, morphological complexity, polysemy of ergative marking, recurrent speech practices and speech acts, consistency of input, and frequency of form in caregiver input. Prosodic salience is critical for acquisition in Mayan languages: suffixes are acquired before prefixes, and syllables before single C morphemes (Brown et al.). Morphologically complex auxiliaries are acquired by Basque children later than morphologically simpler auxiliaries, as noted by Austin. Several authors suggest that polysemy of the ergative with other functions (notably instrumental) may be a factor influencing acquisition, but in Warlpiri and the Papuan languages the agent use emerges before the instrumental use. Some authors (e.g. Stoll and Bickel) touch on the importance of language in interaction and of documenting recurrent speech practices and speech, and the role of modeling and scaffolding via repetition. Rumsey and colleagues conjecture that particular topics and the frequency of particular speech acts help scaffold the acquisition of ergatives.

What children hear is obviously a determinant of what they produce. Consistency of input has been argued to be important, but in fact children can learn to replicate inconsistent and variable input, as Kurmanji Kurdish children do (see above). Frequency of appearance is also important. However, in Kaluli apparent frequency in the input of ergative marking in a formulaic phrase 'X-ergative will say (something)' did not correlate with early correct and consistent use of ergative with the agent of the 'say' verb. A major problem with measuring input frequency is the size and representativeness of the input corpus. For the Hindi input (samples from fifteen sessions, apparently around 5,500 verbal clauses), Narasimhan observes 'there does not appear to be much overlap in the types of verbs or core arguments used by caregivers and by children' (235).

Most papers use as a measure of the frequency of ergative forms how often they appear in clauses (measured by verb tokens), with an implicit assumption of frequency relative to other forms. So a Warlpiri child who produces one ergative token in the course of producing nineteen ergative case-frame verbs is deemed by EDITH BAVIN to have infrequent ergative case morphology. A more psychologically plausible measure relates to how often a feature is heard within a time period (Stoll & Bickel 2012). Once an hour may be frequent enough for the child to acquire the feature.

Several authors claim that ellipsis (pro-drop) reduces evidence for ergativity in the input. Overt subject/object nominals are not common in the input because, for pragmatic reasons, they are often represented by pronouns. If the pronouns are overt and have case marking, then this is part of the input to the children. If there is no overt pronoun, then it is assumed that this reduces the input for the children. However, the absence of an overt subject/object nominal can be taken as a gap in the paradigm, interpreted as a continuing topic that is third singular subject or object. So, what is important for Warlpiri is that 'pro-drop' is interpretable along syntactic nominative-accusative lines. It provides evidence for a subject or object, but not for morphological ergativity. In fact, the discourse prominence accorded to overt nominals may actually draw attention to the ergative marking, as Stoll and Bickel propose.

In some multilingual communities/communities with complex language ecologies undergoing rapid shift, it may not be clear exactly what target languages the children are aiming for (see O'Shannessy 2006 for Warlpiri). Allen and LAURA MAHALINGAPPA give illuminating accounts of language change in two different such situations (Arctic Quebec Inuktitut and Kurmanji Kurdish, respectively). But the description of the target language(s) is a weak point in some papers. Small

speech communities can undergo very rapid language change, especially if there is no braking effect from widespread literacy in the language or the use of the language in school and official contexts. Ideally, authors would describe the target language spoken around the children and not, for example, data gathered thirty years earlier. Some authors source target-language examples from standard reference grammars, but not all authors do, leading to examples with spellings or glosses that differ considerably from the recorded grammatical descriptions (e.g. Warlpiri exx. 2, 3a–c, 4b, 13); are they errors or hitherto unattested forms/glosses? It is crucial that each type of data be properly sourced, including the time of gathering.

Studying the acquisition of language in small speech communities is not easy—it requires mastery of the target language, good understanding of the context, and excellent relations with caregivers. These authors provide rich material for research into acquisition of language in small communities and for understanding ergativity.

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Why only us? Language and evolution. By Robert C. Berwick and Noam Chomsky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016. Pp. 224. ISBN 9780262034241. $22.95 (Hb).

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1. Chomsky's knot. It is a good thing that we linguists are discussing language evolution, for without linguists' input, this important question cannot be properly addressed. Likewise, 'like other biological phenomena, language cannot be fully understood without reference to its evolution, whether proven or hypothesized' (Givón 2002:39, emphasis added). In that sense, Berwick and Chomsky's book is important; being written by scholars of such great stature, it sends a clear message that this topic is both timely and relevant for linguists. While there has been a slight (tacit) shift from some of their previous claims, my conclusion is that B&C's proposal still keeps them and many other linguists tied in a knot, a knot that prevents them from developing new hypotheses and angles to be explored. This leaves ample room for the alternative approaches to language evolution, the ones that B&C dismiss.

It is encouraging to see that B&C have softened, as least to some extent, their original stance on the emergence of language, as well as the vehemence of their criticism of opposing views. For example, while they do not acknowledge this, B&C have significantly shifted their estimated date of the emergence of language to up to 200,000 years ago (157), from the previous 'just a bit over 50,000 years ago' (Chomsky 2005). In this respect, they meet almost half way Dediu and Levinson's (2013) estimate that language dates back to the common ancestor of humans and Neanderthals, to some 400,000–500,000 years ago (for sharp criticism of Dediu and Levinson's claims, see e.g. Berwick et al. 2013). Not only that, but B&C no longer claim that Neanderthals did not have language. Instead, B&C now say that it is the '$64,000 question whether Neander-