

Factors affecting the use of the ergative marker in Gurindji Kriol and individual speaker constraint rankings

Gurindji Kriol (GK) is a mixed language spoken in northern Australia, which exhibits a structural split along language lines between the NP (Gurindji) and VP (Kriol) systems (McConvell & Meakins, 2005; Meakins & O'Shannessy, 2006). One of the features of this mixed language is the great variation which exists between speakers. Of interest here is the nominal structure of GK. Gurindji provides the inflectional and derivational morphology of the nominal system, however these markers have not been transferred without some alternation.

(1)

- (a) **WB an LD an nyuntu**, yumob bin *jayijayi jurlaka* na.
NAME CONJ NAME **an** 2SG 2PL PST chase bird DIS
- (b) **WB-ngku** baldan na *karnti-ngku* meik-im im baldan.
NAME-ERG fall.over DIS **branch-ERG** make-TRN 3SG fall.over
- (c) *nyuntu an LD-tu jayijayi* dat *jurlaka*.
2SG CONJ NAME-ERG chase that bird

The ergative marker has become optional (1a and c), used only for the essential disambiguation of arguments. Other factors are employed to distinguish NPs, such as word order (a) and animacy (b), and these affect the appearance of the ergative marker. This case suffix also appears on subjects of intransitive clauses (b) and has also taken on a number of pragmatic functions related to topic prominence (Meakins & O'Shannessy, 2004; O'Shannessy & Meakins, 2006).

The appearance of the ergative marker in individual speech patterns is affected by these functions, however to differing degrees. I will provide an overview of the use of the ergative marker in GK and then present case studies of three twenty-something GK speakers from the same peer group. I will demonstrate that these three speakers base their use of the ergative marker on the same pool of factors, however they rank these factors in different ways. This different ranking occurs without any apparent impairment to communication.

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