

Norwegian Possessive Constructions in Bilingual Acquisition and Attrition

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1. Introduction: Norwegian possessives

- Norwegian possessives can be pre- or postnominal:

(1) **Min bil / bil-en min**
my car/ car.DEF my
'my car'

Interpretive difference:

- Prenominal possessive has contrastive interpretation and prosodic prominence on possessor (**min bil**).
- Postnominal possessive has a weak possessive interpretation and prosodic prominence on possessee (**bil-en min**).

1. Introduction: Neutral vs. contrastive possessives

MOT (Ann.05):

(2) *Ja den derre jabba hennes den går i ett sett.*
yes that there **mouth her** it goes in one set
'Yes, that mouth of hers it moves non-stop.'

Æ hørte hennes stemme over alle de andre når....
I heard **her voice** over all the others when....
'I heard HER voice above all the others when...'

1. Introduction: Aims

Investigate possessive structures in two groups:

- Two bilingual children acquiring English/Norwegian
- A group of Norwegian heritage speakers in the US

Previous study (Anderssen & Westergaard 2010):

- Monolingual children have an early preference for POSS-NOUN order, the least frequent one.
- Frequency cannot explain child behaviour; complexity can.
- Both bilingual groups: some overuse of POSS-NOUN

2. Background: Theoretical assumptions

Scandinavian DPs:

- Two determiner positions, one above and one below adjectival projection (Taraldsen 1990).
- Suffixal article associated with low position (Vangsnes 1999; Julien 2005; Anderssen 2006).
- Possessive located above base-position of noun, but below suffixal article.

(3) (DET - ADJ) **DET - POSS - NOUN**

2. Background: Theoretical assumptions

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- Possessive located above base-position of noun, but below suffixal article.

(3) **DET - POSS - NOUN**

2. Background: Syntax

- Prenominal possessive involves no movement.

(4) **Min bil**
my car

(DET) POSS – NOUN

- Postnominal possessive involves movement of N

(5) **bil-en min bil.**
car.DEF my (car)

NOUN+DET – POSS – NOUN

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2. Background: Input frequency

Table 2: Prenominal and postnominal possessors, adults.

	Poss-N (%)	N-Poss (%)
FAT Ina.01-27	3 (7.5)	37 (92.5)
MOT Ina.01-27	15 (19.7)	61 (80.3)
INV Ina.01-27	99 (26.4)	276 (73.6)
MOT Ann.01-21	25 (19.2)	105 (80.8)
FAT Ann.01-21	1 (100)	0 (0)
MOT Ole.01-22	9 (23.1)	30 (76.9)
FAT Ole.01-22	3 (14.3)	18 (85.7)
INV Ole.13-22	52 (35)	96 (65)
INV Ole.01-13	23 (21.1)	86 (78.9)
INV Ann.01-21	54 (23)	142 (77)
Total	284 (25%)	851 (75%)

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2. Background: Input frequency

- NoTa corpus of spoken Oslo Norwegian (166 speakers)

Table 3. Possessive structures in NoTa.

CONSTRUCTION	N	%
POSS-N	700	27.1%
N-POSS	1883	72.9%
TOTAL	2583	100%

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2. Background: Monolingual child data

Table 4: Percentage of N-Poss word orders (N-poss/ total poss)

Child	Period 1 (1;8-2;0)	Period 2 (2;0-2;4)	Period 3 (2;4-2;8)	Period 4 (2;8-3;0)
Ina	0 (0/0)	67 (8/12)	86 (37/43)	62 (84/135)
Ann	0 (0/2)	53 (10/19)	79 (27/34)	67 (20/30)
Ole	0 (0/5)	43 (6/14)	74 (23/31)	41 (43/105)
Total	0 (0/7)	53 (24/45)	79 (87/108)	54 (147/270)

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2. Background: Examples monolinguals

- Children start out with prenominal possessives - these remain predominant when postnominal possessives appear:

(6) **min seng** (Ann 1;11.0)
my bed

- The children use the POSS-N structures in non-contrastive contexts:

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2. Background: Non-target-consistent use of possessives in monolinguals

- (7) Ole: *her dætt av hjulan.*
here fall off wheel.pl.def
'the wheels are falling off here.'
- Inv: *dætt hjulan demmes av?*
falls wheel.pl.def their off
'are their wheels falling off?'
- Ole: *ja, demmes hjula dætt av.*
yes their wheel.pl fall off
'yes, their wheels are falling off.' (Ole 2;2.12)

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3. Hypotheses

We have seen:

- POSS-N (*my car*) less complex than N-POSS (*car my*)
- POSS-N (25%) less frequent than N-POSS (75%)
- POSS-N preferred by monolingual children
- What do we expect in the two English/Norwegian bilingual situations?

→ Expect POSS-N to be even more strongly preferred (overused) by English/Norwegian bilingual children.

→ Expect N-POSS vulnerable to attrition in English/Norwegian heritage speakers.

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4. Bilingual Acquisition: Subjects

- Data from two English/Norwegian bilingual children; 7 Norwegian files each:

Sunniva (1;8.8 – 2;7.24), Norwegian mother, English father.

Emma (2;7.10 – 2;10.9), American mother, Norwegian father.

- Both children in nursery from one and use English as home language.

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4. Bilingual Acquisition: POSS-N orders

Table 4: Percentage of N-Poss word order (N-Poss/Total Poss)

Child	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
	(1;8-2;0)	(2;0-2;4)	(2;4-2;8)	(2;8-3;0)
Sunniva	27 (4/15)	100 (2/2)	33 (1/3)	-----
Emma	-----	-----	30 (3/10)	84 (21/25)
Total	27 (4/15)	100 (2/2)	31 (4/13)	84 (21/25)

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4. Bilingual Acquisition: Early pre- and postnominal possessives

- Unlike the monolinguals, Sunniva uses pre- and postnominal possessives in first files:

(8) *Nei, ikke min kjole* (Sun, 1;8.8)
no not my dress
'No it isn't my dress.'

(9) *Baby min* (TARGET: Baby-en min)
baby my baby-the my
'My baby.'

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4. Bilingual Acquisition: Non-target use of prenominal possessives

- Both the bilingual children use the POSS-N structures in non-contrastive contexts:

(10) *Den er ikke i min veska.* (Sun, 1;10.16)
it is not in my handbag
'It isn't in my handbag.'

(11) *Den tog har æ fått mi mamma.* (Emm, 2;7.10)
that train have I got my mummy
'That train I got from my mummy.'

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4. Bilingual Acquisition: Conclusion

- Both Sunniva and Emma use a high proportion of prenominal possessives.
- Like monolingual Norwegian speakers, both use prenominal possessives in non-contrastive context.
- This preference for prenominal possessives seems to persist for longer in the bilinguals: hypothesis confirmed
- Caution: Too little data....

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5. Heritage speakers

- 3rd generation Norwegian-Americans, age approx. 70-90
- Norwegian from birth, English typically from age 5-6
- Learned Norwegian from parents/grandparents (only to limited extent from the community)
- Have not passed on the language to the next generation
- English dominant – Norwegian used only for special occasions and with few other speakers
- Minimal reading or writing skills in Norwegian
- Mainly speakers of rural East Norwegian dialects

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5. Heritage speakers: Rural Norwegian Dialects

- Postnominal possessor construction may lack definiteness with some kinship terms, e.g.

far min, mor mi, sønn min, bestemor mi
father my.M, mother my.F, son my.M, grandmother my.F

- But:
**kjerring mi, *kone mi, *søskenbarn mitt*
woman my.F, wife my.F, cousin my.N

Kinship terms very frequent in these conversations.

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5. Heritage speakers: Main findings

37 informants (27 M, 10F) – 33 produce possessives

CONSTRUCTION	N	%
N _{def} -POSS	153	33.8%
N _{bare} -POSS	209	46.1%
POSS-N	90	19.9%
POSS-N-POSS	1	0.2%
TOTAL	453	100%

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5. Heritage speakers: N-POSS vulnerable?

N-POSS very robust 33.8% + 46.1% = **79.9%**
(gender & number generally ok):

- (13) *farmen min* (1M Blair)
farm.DEF my.M
- (14) *kjerringa mi*
wife.DEF my.F
- (15) *maskineriet mitt*
machinery.DEF my.N
- (16) *unga mine*
kids.PL my.PL

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5. Heritage speakers: Productivity of N-POSS

- (17) *schoolhouse'n din* (3M SpringG)
schoolhouse.DEF your
- (18) *office'n hass* (7M Spring G)
office.DEF his
- (19) *family'n hennes* (5M SpringG)
family.DEF her
- (20) *familien her (=hennes)* (1M Spring G)
family.DEF her

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5. Heritage speakers: N_{bare}-POSS

N_{bare}-POSS most frequent construction (46.1%)

- (21) *far og mor mi* (1M Blair)
father and mother my.F
- (22) *mor og far min*
mother and father my.M
- (23) *dotter mi, sønn hass, mor våres, bæssfar min*
daughter my.F, son his.M, mother our, granddad my.M

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5. Heritage speakers: Definiteness vulnerable

14.4% (30/209) N_{bare}-POSS are ungrammatical

- (24) *søskenbarn vårt, *onkel vårres (4M Coon V)
cousin our.N, uncle our
- (25) *forelder dems (1M Decorah)
parent(s) their
- (26) *kone mitt, *begge to gutter min (2M Blair)
wife my.N, both two boys my.M.SG

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5. Heritage speakers: Overuse of POSS-N?

No – only 19.9% (90/453) – less than in Norwegian corpora.

Furthermore - 73.3% (66/90) POSS-N produced by only 3 speakers:

SPEAKER	N	%
1F Harmony	17/28	60.7%
3M Westby	28/29	96.6%
6M Spring Grove	21/21	100%

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5. Heritage speakers: Examples POSS-N

(27) Når jeg var liten **min far og mor** snakket god norsk, men de snakket ikke til meg, veit du. (6M Spring Grove)
when I was little my father and mother spoke good Norwegian, but they didn't speak to me, you know

(28) **Min bestmor**, je kan itte husse at jeg hørde henne si ett engelsk ord. (3M Westby)
my grandmother, I cannot remember that I heard her say one English word

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5. Heritage speakers: Examples POSS-N

(29) Han levde med oss somme tider for fire år og så da reiste han bakers til **sin far** (1F Harmony)
he lived with us sometimes for 4 years and then he went back to his father

Remaining examples (24/90) produced by 16 speakers, mainly fixed expressions:

(30) *alt mitt liv, mi tid
all my life, my time

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5. Heritage speakers: Overuse of N-POSS?

Pragmatic distinction (contrast) lost?

- Not many clearly contrastive contexts
- Always possible to use prosody to express contrast in the N-POSS construction (bilen MIN 'MY car')

Geographical, historical, individual and/or stylistic differences?
(need to be investigated further)

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5. Heritage speakers: Why loss of N-POSS in three speakers?

- Different nouns used (more challenging topics)? No.
- Active RE-learners of Norwegian – similar to 2nd lg learners?

Some evidence:

- (31) Så jeg lærte det til **mine studentene** når jeg var en lærer ... (6M Spring Grove)
so I taught it to my students when I was a teacher ...

- Literacy? 2/3 speakers read Norwegian regularly (only 4/34 of the others claim some reading skills)

POSS-N overuse is an acquisition feature, not a feature of attrition.

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5. Heritage speakers: Summary

- N-POSS word order is robust (79.9%) and productive (Caution: Different results possible with more challenging task)
- Definiteness vulnerable
- 3 speakers produce predominantly POSS-N,
- Loss of N-POSS related to RE-learning of the language?

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6. Discussion

Why is N-POSS vulnerable in Acquisition but not in Attrition?

What role does the pragmatics of the possessive constructions play?

Why is definiteness vulnerable in bilingual acquisition and attrition (not in 1LA)?

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6. Discussion: Frequency vs. complexity

(N-POSS is complex but frequent)

- **Complexity** is a crucial factor in the acquisition process, not in attrition
- **Frequency** is a crucial factor in the attrition process: Once acquired, complex features are not vulnerable if frequent in the input

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6. Discussion: Syntax vs. pragmatics

- Phenomena involving syntax/pragmatic interface especially vulnerable (Interface Hypothesis, Sorace 2011) – in both acquisition and attrition?
- Mono- and bilingual children seem not to know pragmatic distinction between POSS-N and N-POSS (overuse of POSS-N in non-contrastive contexts).
- Heritage speakers: Not enough production of both word orders to distinguish the two pragmatically.

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6. Discussion: Syntax vs. morphology

- Definiteness morphology missing, e.g. *baby min* 'baby my', *søskenbarn vårt* 'cousin our', *alle barn hans* 'all children his'.
- N-POSS word order is robust and productive (e.g. *schoolhouse'n din* 'schoolhouse your', *familien her*)
- Overgeneralization from frequent kinship terms to other nouns?
- Transfer from English?
- Morphology especially vulnerable in both L2 acquisition and attrition (cf. e.g. Gürel 2008).

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6. Summary/Conclusion

- Prediction: N-POSS vulnerable (complexity, transfer from English)
- Findings
 - Bilingual children: High proportion of POSS-N, also in non-contrastive contexts. Persists longer than in monolinguals?
 - Heritage speakers: N-POSS robust and productive. No gradual loss of N-POSS - but (more or less) complete loss in 3 speakers (RE-learners?)
- Hypothesis partly confirmed.
- Main argument: Complexity is important in acquisition process - frequency prevents attrition.

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