

## Word Order Variation in Bilingual Acquisition and Attrition: The Case of Norwegian Possessive Constructions

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In possessive constructions in Norwegian, the possessor may precede or follow the head noun, illustrated in (1a-b). In the latter construction, the suffixal definite article is obligatory. The distinction between the two word orders is related to information structure, in that the construction in (1a) puts emphasis on the possessor, which often gives a contrastive reading.

- (1) a. *min stol*  
my chair  
b. *stolen min*  
chair.DEF mine  
'My chair.'

In Julien (2005) and Anderssen (2006), it is argued that the construction with a postnominal possessor (1b) is more complex, involving movement of the head noun across the possessor. Based on a corpus of child-directed speech, Anderssen & Westergaard (2010) show that this construction is also the more frequent one in the adult language (approximately 75%). This is therefore a relatively rare example where complexity and frequency go hand in hand. Monolingual Norwegian children are shown to have a slight preference for the prenominal possessive construction early on, i.e. the least complex and least frequent one. This is argued to be an indication that children do not simply pay attention to frequency in the input, but choose the more economical construction (without syntactic movement).

Due to the findings from monolingual children, it is to be predicted that the construction with a postnominal possessor would be vulnerable in bilingual acquisition and attrition. This could especially be the case when the other language involved is English, which only has prenominal possessors.

In the present paper we consider early acquisition data from three Norwegian-English bilingual children, Sunniva (age 1;6.29-2;8), Markus (age 1;8-2;1) and Emma (age 2;7.10-2;9.25). Furthermore, we investigate data from several third-generation heritage speakers of Norwegian living in the USA. Contrary to our expectations, we find that the postnominal possessive construction is intact in both groups, see examples (2)-(3). Despite its complexity, it thus seems to be a relatively stable feature of the grammar, possibly due to its frequency in every-day speech. However, while the proportions of the two constructions in the data of the bilingual children correspond to those of Norwegian monolingual children, the frequency of the postnominal possessor is found to be dependent on the level of attrition in the heritage speakers. Our prediction is thus partly confirmed.

- (2) *æ ordne krona mi.* (Emma, 2;7.21)  
I fix crown.DEF mine  
'I am fixing my crown.'  
(3) *skal je kjemme håret mitt?* (blair\_WI\_sep\_12gm)  
shall I comb hair.DEF mine  
'Should I comb my hair?'

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