
Exploring genitive variation in learner English: the influence of L1 and proficiency

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Extending the research of recent studies on the genitive alternation acquired by learners of English (Gries & Wulff 2013, Azaz 2020, Dubois et al. 2022, 2023), the following two studies (an acceptability judgment task and a self-paced reading task) focus on the preference/processing by learners of English. They investigate in how far the well-known effects of Animacy and Possessor Type that have been found to affect the genitive alternation in native speakers also affect monolingual and bilingual learners in the same way, and in how far these the role of these determinants is influenced by the L1 background or proficiency of the speakers is investigated.

Each experiment involved three participant groups: monolingual native speakers of English, monolingual learners with German as L1, and bilingual heritage speakers with Turkish and German as L1s. Based on previous findings, Animacy as well as Possessor Type were expected to influence the preference for the *s*-genitive (cf. Rosenbach 2002), especially in native speakers. The results of the first experiment confirm the expected pattern that learners are less strict in rejecting the combination of proper nouns with the *of*-genitive. The preliminary analysis of the reading latencies that is available at the time of writing supports the general thrust of these predictions, although the influence of the linguistic background appears to be rather complex in nature. Additionally, the results reveal small, but significant differences between the monolingual and the bilingual learners. While most of these effects may be attributed to individual differences in the acquisition and use of English as an L2/L3, the linguistic background of the bilingual heritage speakers still can be identified as an important factor, on grounds of the structures in both languages that differ moderately in their use: In Turkish, there is no variation, structurally similar to the *s*-genitive, whereas in German, variation is possible (*s*-genitive with proper noun possessors, *of*-genitive for both possessor types (*des* or the dative combination of *von* and determinative).

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