

Word order and definiteness in the Norwegian DP: Complexity, frequency and structural similarity in bilingual acquisition and attrition

Norwegian DP constructions are relatively complex, especially compared to English. Norwegian possessives may be pre- or postnominal (1a, b), while English possessives are always prenominal (1c). The distinction between the two word orders in Norwegian is dependent on information structure; the prenominal adds contrastive stress on the possessor, while the postnominal is neutral. Furthermore, postnominal possessors have to co-occur with a noun in the definite form (1b). Norwegian also differs from English in having a suffixal definite article (1b, 2a) and in having definiteness marked twice in modified definite noun phrases (2b), by both a suffixal article and a preadjectival free determiner (double definiteness).

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|-----|----|--|----|--|----|-----------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>min stol</i>
my chair
'MY chair' | b. | <i>stol-en min</i>
chair.DEF my
'my chair' | c. | <i>my chair</i> |
| (2) | a. | <i>hus -et</i>
house.DEF
'the house' | b. | <i>det gamle hus -et</i>
DEF old house.DEF
'the old house' | | |

These structures allow us to consider factors such as frequency, complexity, and structural similarity: Postnominal possessives are used considerably more frequently than prenominal possessives (75%), but are also argued to be more complex, involving both definiteness marking and syntactic movement (Anderssen & Westergaard 2010, Lødrup 2012). Prenominal possessives, on the other hand, are structurally more similar to their English counterparts. Double definiteness is both complex and infrequent. Within the DP structure, the suffix is extremely frequent, while the prenominal determiner is infrequent but structurally similar to English.

In Anderssen & Westergaard (2010), monolingual Norwegian children are shown to use both word orders in possessives, but to have a 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, but choose the more economical construction (without syntactic movement). Anderssen & Westergaard (2012) investigate the use of possessives in Norwegian-English bilingual children and Norwegian heritage speakers in the US. The results reveal that, while the bilingual children have a stronger and more long-lasting preference for prenominal possessives than the monolinguals, see (2), the heritage speakers almost exclusively use postnominal possessor constructions, also with English loanwords, cf. (3). It is thus argued that, while the lack of complexity makes prenominal possessives the preferred order in language acquisition, the high frequency of the postnominal possessor protects it against language attrition.

- (2) *Den er ikke i min veska.* (Sun, 1;10.16)
it is not in my handbag.DEF
- (3) *schoolhouse'n din* (3M SpringG)
schoolhouse.DEF your

Similar findings have recently been made with respect to adjective-noun word order in Italian-German bilingual acquisition and attrition (Kupisch 2012), where the heritage speakers are argued to pay attention to frequency and structural *difference*.

Against this backdrop, we re-evaluate the Anderssen & Westergaard (2012) data in this paper and argue that frequency is a more important factor in attrition than complexity or structural similarity. We also provide some further data on double definiteness (cf. 2b) from one bilingual child as well as a number of heritage speakers and compare the findings to monolingual acquisition (Anderssen 2006). Given that double definiteness is both complex and infrequent, we expect it to be vulnerable in both bilingual groups, as it is in monolinguals, who have been shown to omit the prenominal determiner for an extended period of time, cf. (4). Our findings show that the bilingual child investigated to a large extent omits the suffix (55.6%, 10/18), cf. example (5), even though this is produced in a target-consistent manner in her simple definites. The heritage speakers, on the other hand, are found to omit the prenominal determiner as often as 57% (37/65) (and the suffix only 3.1%, 2/65), despite its structural similarity to English, cf. (6).

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| (4) | <i>store trollet</i>
big troll.DEF | (Ina, 2;1.0)
(Target: det store trollet) |
| (5) | <i>den stor ball</i>
the big ball | (Emma 2;7.10)
(Target: den store ballen) |
| (6) | <i>engelske skolen</i>
English school.DEF | (<i>coon_valley_WI_sep_03gm</i>)
(Target: den engelsk skolen) |

We argue that our results support the hypothesis that complexity plays a more important role than frequency in acquisition. Furthermore, structural similarity may be a factor in bilingual acquisition. In attrition, on the other hand, frequency and structural *difference* seem to be the most important factors, accounting for the heritage speakers' lack of prenominal determiners in double definites as well as their overuse of postnominal possessives in Anderssen & Westergaard's (2012) data.

References

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