



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ABOUT THE EXPRESSION
OF

POSSESSION IN L2 ENGLISH

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19 de Junio de 2014

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2013-2014

ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides empirical data on the acquisition of an English grammar property in non-native speakers of English (L2) with Spanish as the first language (L1). It is a study where results obtained from a group of teenagers are analyzed in terms of their most common errors with regards to the expression of possession in English and with a focus on the Saxon Genitive construction. The analysis of empirical data carried out in this dissertation about the students' preferences shows that, although the expression of possession is common for both languages, the Saxon Genitive construction is only present in English and it is, therefore, the locus of non-native-like structures mainly due to cross-linguistic influence.

KEYWORDS: Acquisition, cross-linguistic influence, Genitive construction, *of*-construction, orthographic issues, possession.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo aporta datos empíricos sobre la adquisición de una propiedad gramatical del inglés por parte de hablantes nativos de español que tienen el inglés como segunda lengua. Es un estudio donde se analizan los resultados obtenidos y el tipo de errores cometidos por parte de un grupo de adolescentes en relación con la posesión en inglés y más específicamente con la construcción del Genitivo Sajón. El análisis de los datos empíricos realizado en este trabajo sobre las preferencias de los participantes muestra que, aunque la posesión se puede expresar en ambas lenguas, la construcción del Genitivo Sajón sólo existe en inglés y constituye, por tanto, un área vulnerable para la influencia interlingüística.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Adquisición, influencia interlingüística, construcción del Genitivo, construcción preposicional, aspectos ortográficos, posesión.

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FOREWORD: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The present undergraduate dissertation is the final formal requirement to complete the degree in English Studies at the University of Valladolid. It is related to contents in the A2 subject “Scientific description of the English Language” as in the teaching guide (2014). This subject comprises the following seven courses: three on English descriptive grammar, two on phonetics and phonology, one on the origins of the English language and the last one on English/Spanish comparative grammar. This dissertation focuses on the description of the English grammar and offers a comparative view between English and Spanish.

More specifically this dissertation is on the expression of possession with a focus on the Saxon Genitive construction. I have chosen this particular aspect of the English grammar because I think it is problematic for students of English as an L2. This means that the analysis of the Saxon Genitive and of how Spanish speakers learning English produce this type of structure could provide me with very useful information at least in three respects. First, as a non-native speaker, doing research on this specific area will help me master it; second, as a researcher, I will be familiar with the research procedure of analyzing previous works, deciding on my own research questions, designing my own test and codifying and interpreting the data I have elicited; and third, as a future English teacher, knowing where some grammar difficulties lie and how they could be overcome will make me aware of them and worth considering as part of my teaching methodology.

This dissertation has offered me the opportunity to undertake independent research on a specific grammar topic (i.e. the possession in English) and has enabled me both to explore this topic in more depth than in an assignment essay and to point to how the teaching of English as an L2 could be benefited from a grammatical analysis. Since research and teaching are the two most common professional activities related to the degree in English Studies. I have connected both in my dissertation as a possible way to guide my future professional career.

In this dissertation, the competences acquired in the different courses along the four-year degree are integrated and applied. In particular, through the elaboration of the present dissertation I have had to use the following general and specific competences described

below. While working on the possession, I have initially carried out a bibliographical search using the resources available in the faculty library, both on-line and off-line. This has strengthened both general and specific competences like the following:

- Capacity to analyze and systematize, conceptualization and abstraction.
- Ability to manage technological means and resources.
- Research skills: investigation techniques and documentation.
- Skills on managing information.
- Ability to identify, manage and synthesis bibliography.
- Ability to manage specific technological means and resources related to the main professional possibilities of the degree.

Although I have been working under the supervision of my tutor, I have been able to develop my own research work by eliciting my own linguistic data whose analysis I present in this dissertation. This way of working reflects general competences like the following: autonomous learning; ethic, critic and constructive spirit; creativity; ability to solve problems.

Given that the focus of my work is not only on grammatical description but on how to account for the type of structures L2 learners produce in a given teaching context, my dissertation also covers specific competences like the ones below:

- Capacity to write and speak in the English language.
- Capacity to understand and produce in the English language texts related to the main professional possibilities of the degree.
- Capacity to relate linguistic knowledge with other areas and disciplines.

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a second language is often a hard task for non-native speakers and regarding some specific grammar properties this task could be even harder. This is the case of the expression of possession in English and how it is acquired by Spanish native speakers.

This dissertation is based on an empirical investigation and it considers how Spanish speakers learning English as a second language (L2) in an academic setting master the expression of possession in English. In this respect, Spanish and English have some common properties: they can both express that something (i.e. thing possessed) belongs to someone (i.e. possessor) and they can both use possessive pronouns and possessive determiners to express the idea of possession. However, possession can be conveyed using possessive constructions and in this respect a difference between English and Spanish appears: both languages can use the so-called *of*-construction but only English includes the Saxon Genitive construction to express possession. This dissertation will focus on these two expressions.

The expression of possession is a grammatical property that is usually gradually acquired in L2 contexts but it is also a grammatical property that involves specific difficulties for Spanish speakers who are learning English as their L2. Generally these difficulties are related to cross-linguistic influence from their first language (L1, i.e. Spanish) into their L2 (i.e. English). The inexistence of an equivalent possessive construction in the learners' L1, as it is the case of one of the possessive constructions this dissertation deals with (the Saxon Genitive) can cause difficulties in the learning process and also the overuse of the other possessive construction (the *of*-construction), which is the one used in Spanish. In this way, the analysis of empirical data carried out in this dissertation about the students' preferences and their production of possessive structures will show the knowledge they have on the distribution of possessive structures (*of*-construction and Genitive construction) taking into account the following: that their L1 does not have the Saxon Genitive expression; that they have to acquire it as a new property; and that they have to learn the distribution of both constructions in English which corresponds to the same construction in Spanish.

This dissertation is broken down into the following sections: section 2 presents a description of the structures under analysis; section 3 outlines the objectives; the

methodology carried out in this empirical study is presented in section 4 which also includes, the description and the analysis of empirical data elicited from a group of 40 English L2 speakers; and the conclusions reached with this study appear in section 5.

1. THE EXPRESSION OF POSSESSION IN ENGLISH

The expression of possession is used to indicate that something is owned or possessed by a possessor. It can be expressed in English by means of possessive determiners like *his*, *their*, *our*, etc., possessive pronouns like *ours*, *yours*, etc. and also, by two different constructions which are the Saxon Genitive and the *of*-construction. This section will focus on the main differences established between both constructions with a special focus on the Saxon Genitive since the present dissertation is not concerned with either possessive pronouns or possessive determiners. Besides, this section will also deal with the use and the form of the Saxon Genitive construction, in particular with an orthographic variation in the marking of the Genitive case.

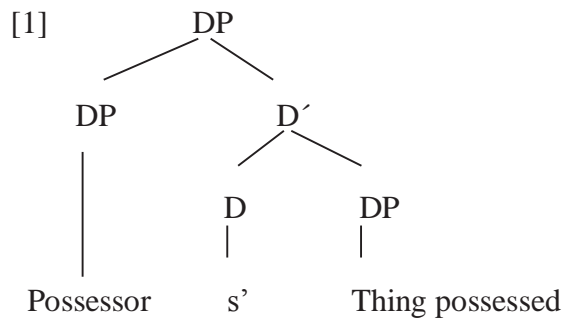
2.1 THE SAXON GENITIVE CONSTRUCTION

Case in nouns marks the structural and semantic function of nouns phrases within sentences. When dealing with case theory, there are two types of case expressions in nouns in English: the unmarked common case, also referred to as abstract case, where the specific case is not indicated in the morphology of the item (i.e. *the girl is singing* where *the girl* is in nominative case and *I saw the girl* where *the girl* is in accusative case) and the marked Genitive case which is the only case marked in the morphology of the noun in English (i.e. *this is the girl's / girls' book* where both *girl's* in the singular or *girls'* in the plural show a mark for Genitive case).

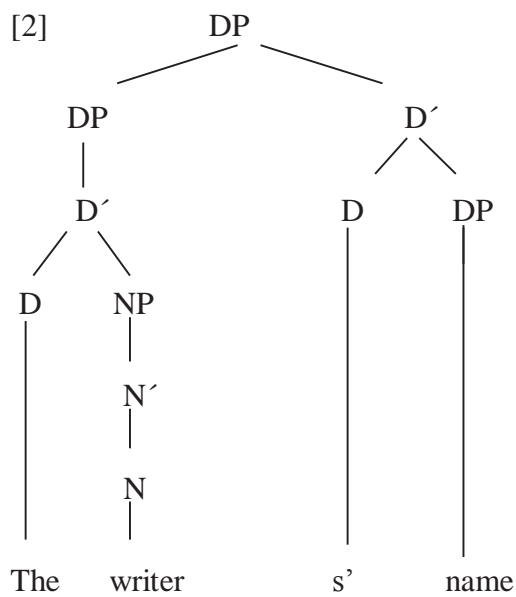
In this dissertation, I will focus on the Genitive case as it is one of the possessive constructions used to express possession in English.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) argue that the *-s* marker of the Genitive case is a “postposed enclitic” because its function is similar to that of a preposition and it acts as a postmodifier of a simple or a complex noun phrase. As a clitic, the possessive *-s* would be placed right under its terminal node occupying the category of determiner within a syntactic tree. It would be assigned to the category of determiner because of two

reasons, according to Lyons (1996): first, it is connected to definiteness as determiners and second - 's selects for no complements, but it must take a DP as a specifier. So that, the possessor DP would be placed in the specifier of DP and the possessed DP would be the complement of D'. This is shown in the tree in [1] extracted from Sag and Wasow (1999, 141



The tree diagram in [2] shows this general previous example applied to a specific DP.



In terms of word-order, the Genitive inflection is always placed right after the possessor and before the thing possessed [i.e. DP + 's + DP]. For example in [3], the head DP is *car* which is the thing possessed while *Anne* is the possessor to which the inflection is attached.

[3] *Anne's car.*

Also, an orthographic variation in the marking of the Genitive inflection can appear. In regular singular nouns that do not end in *-s*, the inflection is added to the noun by using the apostrophe + *s*, as in [4a]. In regular plural nouns or nouns ending *-s*, the inflection is added to the noun just by using the apostrophe, as in [4b] and [4c].

[4a] *The student's application was correct.*

[4b] *Students' applications were correct.*

[4c] *James' application was correct.*

The examples in [4b] and [4c] illustrate the phenomenon called the “zero Genitive” and it is used in order to avoid cacophony when there is a certain combination of sounds at the time of speech as argued by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985, 320).

2.2. THE *OF*-CONSTRUCTION

The *of*-construction, sometimes called the *of*-Genitive, is another construction to express possession in English. It is formed by a noun phrase plus a prepositional phrase plus a noun phrase (i.e. DP + PP + DP), as shown in [5]. It expresses the same phenomenon as the Saxon Genitive construction which is possession but with a different word-order arrangement (i.e. N-head which is *name* + N-modifier which is *the ship*).

[5] *The name of the ship.*

2.3. THE SAXON GENITIVE CONSTRUCTION VERSUS THE *OF*-CONSTRUCTION

The existence of these two structures (Saxon Genitive and *of*-construction) for the expression of possession in English does not involve that they are interchangeable. Rosenbach (2002, 42), for example, argues that factors such as animacy, topicality and possessive relation play a role in the choice between the Genitive and the *of*-construction. In this dissertation, I will only focus on one of these factors so the different DP possessors of both constructions will be classified in terms of animacy. Rosenbach (1985, 42) argues that animacy is an inherent property of nouns that refers to the distinction between living

and non-living things or concepts. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985, 323) also discuss animacy and they point out that DP possessors in Genitive constructions tend to refer to classes of gender nouns (i.e. human beings, higher animals, and collective nouns with personal gender characteristics). Thus, as in example [6], when the possessor DP has a [+animate] feature, the Saxon Genitive construction is preferably used; whereas when the possessor DP, as in example [7], is [-animate] conventionally it is the *of*-construction that is either the preferred option or the only possible option.

[6] *The boy's new bicycle. / The new bicycle of the boy.*

[7] **The problem's part. / The part of the problem.*

The alternation between Genitive constructions and *of*-constructions in the expression of possession in English often create confusion among non-native speakers of English with Spanish as the L1. This is so because the Saxon Genitive construction does not exist in Spanish so speakers cannot rely on L1 properties in this respect; and also because even if speakers are familiar with the existence of the two constructions they might not be that familiar with their different distribution.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major aim of this study is to determine whether Spanish speakers who are learning English as an L2 find difficulties distinguishing between the two possessive constructions and, if there are difficulties, to look for an explanation and any possible solution for the problems that Spanish speakers have when choosing between the Saxon Genitive construction and the *of*-construction.

In the formulation of the research questions that follow I have considered both the description of the structures under analysis presented in section 2 as well as the lack of the Saxon Genitive structure in Spanish, the L1 of the participants in this study. The research questions deal with the three following aspects:

- Type of possessive structures: is there any preference between the Saxon Genitive and the *of*-construction? Are there cases of ungrammatical alternations, that is, use of prepositional constructions where Genitive constructions should be used?

- Orthographic rule: are participants aware of how the Genitive case is marked with respect to this orthographic restrictions?
- Cross-linguistic influence: does transfer from the L1 (Spanish) into the L2 (English) occur? If so, is it seen in an overextension of prepositional constructions given that these are the only ones that express possession in Spanish?
- Type of task: do learners show different error rates depending on how they are being tested? Is the translation task more demanding and therefore more difficult than the multiple choice one? And is the production of possession structures different from the judgment of possession structures?

In order to reach some conclusions about this matter, a study based on the analysis of empirical data obtained from a group of L1 Spanish / L2 English speakers has been carried out and it appears in section 4. The methodology is presented in section 4.1; the data description and analysis are dealt with in sections 4.2 and 4.3 respectively where the different hypotheses corresponding to the research questions outlined above will be provided; and the conclusions appear in section 5.

3. THE STUDY

In this section I present the study which involves the whole process carried out to elaborate this dissertation.

4.1. METHODOLOGY

The methodology involves a description of the participants, of the tasks used to elicit the data and how the data were elicited first and classified then.

4.1.1. STAGE 1: PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted with a group of 40 L1 Spanish speakers aged 15 studying English as an L2 in an institutional context at high school called *Pintor Luis Sáez (Burgos, Spain)*. They have been studying English as an L2 for at least 6 years and they have an elementary level of proficiency in English which is the level they are supposed to have acquired at this age. Currently, they study English at this high school for 3 hours a week.

The English lessons are taught by a native Spanish teacher in a quite Spanish environment.

I have made a previous review of the book they use in their English lessons and I realized that the grammar book (Marks and Addison, 2010) lacks an explicit explanation about the use and the formation of the Saxon Genitive construction. This construction is neither compared with the *of*-construction to avoid students making errors choosing one construction or another.

4.1.2. STAGE 2: TEST DESIGN

The data elicitation tasks involve the two structure types (Genitive and *of*-construction) and the two variations in the case of the Saxon Genitive (i.e. – ‘s and –s’). They have been designed to also capture the participants’ knowledge in terms of their production, selection and judgment of possessive structures. In particular, the elicitation process involves the following three tasks: a translation task, a multiple choice task and an acceptability judgment task. All of these tasks have been designed taking into account the level of the test-takers. In this way, vocabulary has been carefully selected according to their level of English and having made a previous review of the text book they use at high school (Marks and Addison, 2010).

The translation task consists of 16 experimental structures in Spanish that the participants have to translate into English. 8 of them contain possessive constructions 4 structures with the Genitive construction and 4 structures with the *of*-construction. The other 8 structures include orthographic issues and are divided into 4 structures with the construction – ‘s and other 4 with the construction –s’. This type of production task which involves a translation from the L1 into the L2 allows us to detect possible errors due to cross-linguistic influence since transfer from the native language into the L2 may occur. This translation task would also reveal whether the test-takers tend to choose Genitive or prepositional constructions and whether they know the orthographic rule of the Genitive case marking. An example of each of the 4 different experimental structures is shown below for possession with Genitive [8a], possession with prepositional construction [8b], Genitive – ‘s [8c] and Genitive –s’ [8d].

- [8a] *La bicicleta de George.*
George's bicycle. (DP's + DP)
- [8b] *El presidente de los Estados Unidos.*
The president of the United States. (DP + PP + DP)
- [8c] *¿Cuál es el nombre de tu madre?*
What is your mother's name.
- [8d] *Mi hermano compra comida de gatos.*
My brother buys cats' food.
- } Possessive structures
- } Orthographic issues

The multiple choice task consists of 8 experimental groups of 3 constructions. Test-takers have to choose the correct one among these three constructions. These 8 groups of constructions include 4 cases related to Genitive constructions and prepositional constructions, 2 cases with -'s and 2 cases with -s'. The three constructions in each experimental group consist of two types of structures: one in which only one option is correct, as in [9a], where only the option A is correct, and one in which two options are correct, as in [9c], where B is a correct prepositional structure and C is also a correct Genitive construction with -s'. In the experimental groups where two options are correct the analysis is focused on test-takers' preferences, that is, on whether they tend to choose the Genitive structure or the prepositional one. The example [9a] focuses on the Genitive construction (DP + 's + DP) and on the orthographic issue - 's. Participants have to choose the correct structure which is letter A avoiding the other two which are errors. The example [9b] focuses on the orthographic issue -s' and the correct answer is letter A. The last example [9c] focuses on both Genitive and prepositional constructions and letters B and C are both correct.

- [9a] A. *The Birthday party is at John's house.*
 B. *The Birthday party is in the house of John.*
 C. *The Birthday party is at house's John.*
- [9b] A. *The boy is buying dogs' food.*
 B. *The boy is buying dogs's food.*
 C. *The boy is buying food of dogs.*
- [9c] A. *That is Mrs. Jones's car.*
 B. *That is the car of Mrs. Jones.*

C. That is Mrs. Jones' car.

The acceptability judgment (AJ) task is made up of 16 experimental structures that include 4 structures with the Genitive construction, 4 cases with the prepositional construction, 4 cases with the orthographic construction - 's and 4 structures with the orthographic construction -s'. In each condition half the structures were correct and half presented a violation. For example, [10a] and [10b] illustrate the first condition (Genitive construction) but [10a] is correct and [10b] incorrect.

[10a] *We will meet at Bill's house.*

1 2 3 4

[10b] *The car's problem is solved.*

1 2 3 4

In the examples [10c] and [10d] the second condition is reflected which deals with prepositional constructions but [10c] is incorrect and [10d] correct.

[10c] *The newspaper of today is on the table.*

1 2 3 4

[10d] *This is the part of the problem.*

1 2 3 4

The examples [10e] and [10f] illustrate the orthographic issue – 's but [10e] is correct and [10f] incorrect.

[10e] *The children's toys are new.*

1 2 3 4

[10f] *One of Charles Dickens's novels is Oliver Twist.*

1 2 3 4

[10g] and [10h] examples reveal the orthographic construction of -s' and [10g] is correct while [10h] is incorrect.

[10g] *Her parents' house is beautiful.*

1 2 3 4

[10h] *The boys's application is not ready.*

1 2 3 4

Test-takers have to judge the acceptability of each experimental sentence by deciding among 4 options depending on whether the experimental structure is perfectly correct (4), correct (3), wrong (2) or totally wrong (1). This task is useful to test the ability participants

have to find which constructions are correct and which are wrong according to their appreciations on the two types of possessive constructions, as well as to detect whether the participants are more sensitive to some types of ungrammaticalities than others (i.e. orthographic issues).

4.1.3. STAGE 3: DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

These three previous tasks were included in the testing session I did during the last month of April to the group of 40 teenagers. Tests were distributed in a written form to two different classes formed by 20 students in each of them. Every participant had his own test sheet and one hour to complete it. Once I collected the 40 complete test sheets, data were classified.

4.1.4. STAGE 4: DATA CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURE

Data information extracted from tests had to be classified and organized with the aim of obtaining all the results ordered according to the features under consideration and that were presented in section 4.1.2. The results obtained from the students were codified in an excel document attached in the electronic version of this dissertation with a different sheet for each task.

In the case of the translation task, the four structure types (i.e. *of*-construction, Genitive construction, - 's Genitive and -s' Genitive) were classified in terms of whether they were target-like or non-target-like. If they were non-target-like just in the cases of the *of*-construction and the Saxon Genitive, they were further classified as possible (that is correct but different from what I expected) or non-possible. This classification indicates participants' tendencies to produce more *of*-construction constructions or more Saxon Genitive constructions.

In the case of the multiple choice task, the three structure types (i.e. *of*-construction, - 's Genitive and -s' Genitive) were classified in terms of whether they were expected or non-expected. If they were not target-like (i.e. non-expected), they were further classified as possible (that is, different from what I expected but nonetheless correct) or non-possible. This classification captures the behavior of the participants in the three types of structures; it also shows which one is favored by each participant; and the distribution of the answers in terms of target-like or non-target-like.

In the last case, the acceptability judgment task, the four structures types (i.e. *of*-construction, Genitive construction, - 's Genitive and -s' Genitive) were classified in terms of whether they were acceptable (i.e. they are supposed to be rated with a 4 or a 3) or non-acceptable (i.e. they were expected to be rated with a 1 or a 2). Then I did the average of the participants' choices in order to test their ability to detect acceptability or unacceptability.

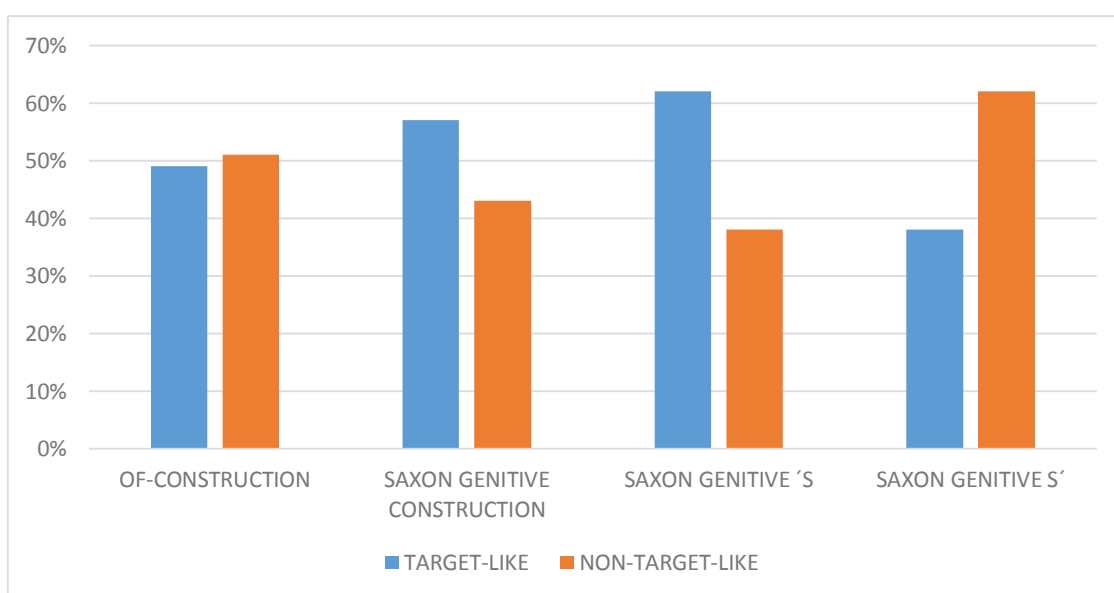
4.2. DATA DESCRIPTION

In this section, I will describe in detail the empirical data obtained from each task.

4.2.1. TRANSLATION DATA DESCRIPTION

This task consists of 16 experimental structures which are further divided in 8 structures related to possessive constructions (4 Saxon Genitive constructions and 4 *of*-constructions) and other 8 structures focused on orthographic issues of the Saxon Genitive (4 with the Genitive inflection - 's and 4 with the Genitive inflection -s'). Students' responses are classified in two groups depending on whether they were the expected ones or not: target-like responses and non-target-like responses.

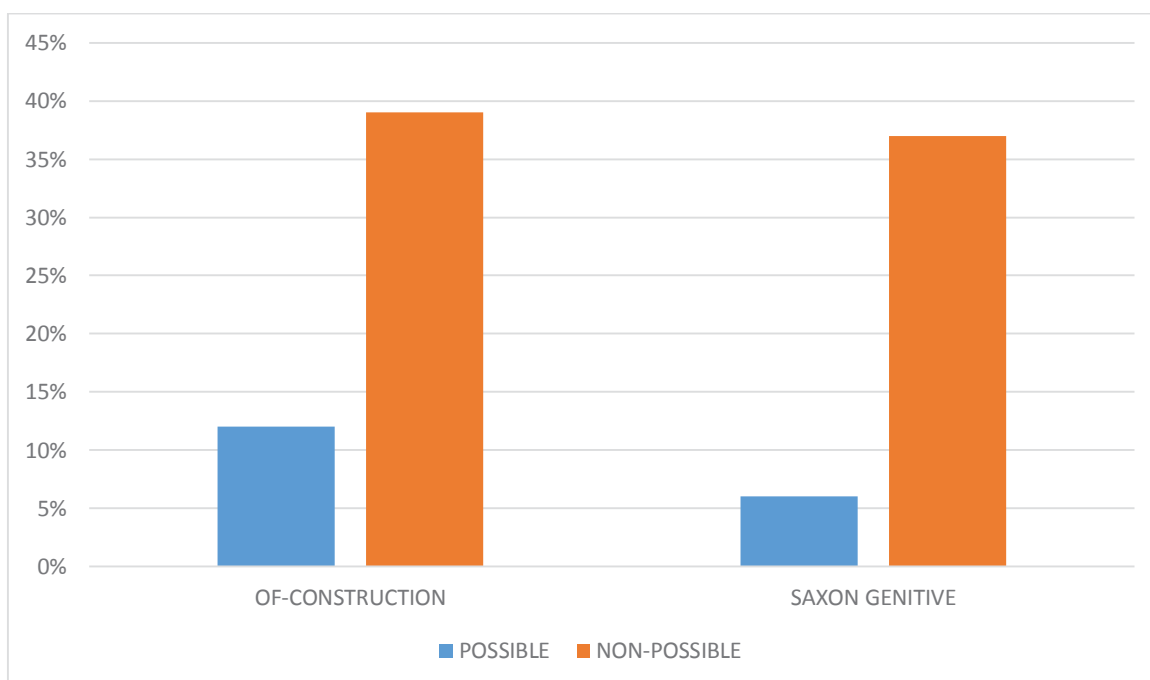
Graph 1 shows the percentages of target-like and non-target-like responses of the 40 participants according to the 4 different constructions included in this task.



Graph 1: target-like answers vs non-target-like answers in the translation task.

49% of the responses with the *of*-construction were expected while the rest 51% were non-target like. The 57% of responses with the Saxon Genitive construction were target-like while the other 43% were not expected. Expected answers with the orthographic issue -‘s were the 62%, and non-expected answers with this structure were the 38% while target-like responses with -s’ were the 38% and non-target-like responses were the 62%.

In graph 2, possible and non-possible unexpected responses are represented. Non-target-like responses related to the two possessive structures (*of*-construction and Saxon Genitive construction) were divided into two groups: (1) possible unexpected responses and (2) non-possible unexpected responses. Participants answered to 12% of responses related to *of*-construction with the possible alternative construction (Saxon Genitive construction) which was not the expected one. The other 39% of responses belongs to non-possible unexpected answers. In relation to the Saxon Genitive construction, only the 6% are possible responses with the alternative *of*-construction and the other 37% belongs to non-possible unexpected responses.



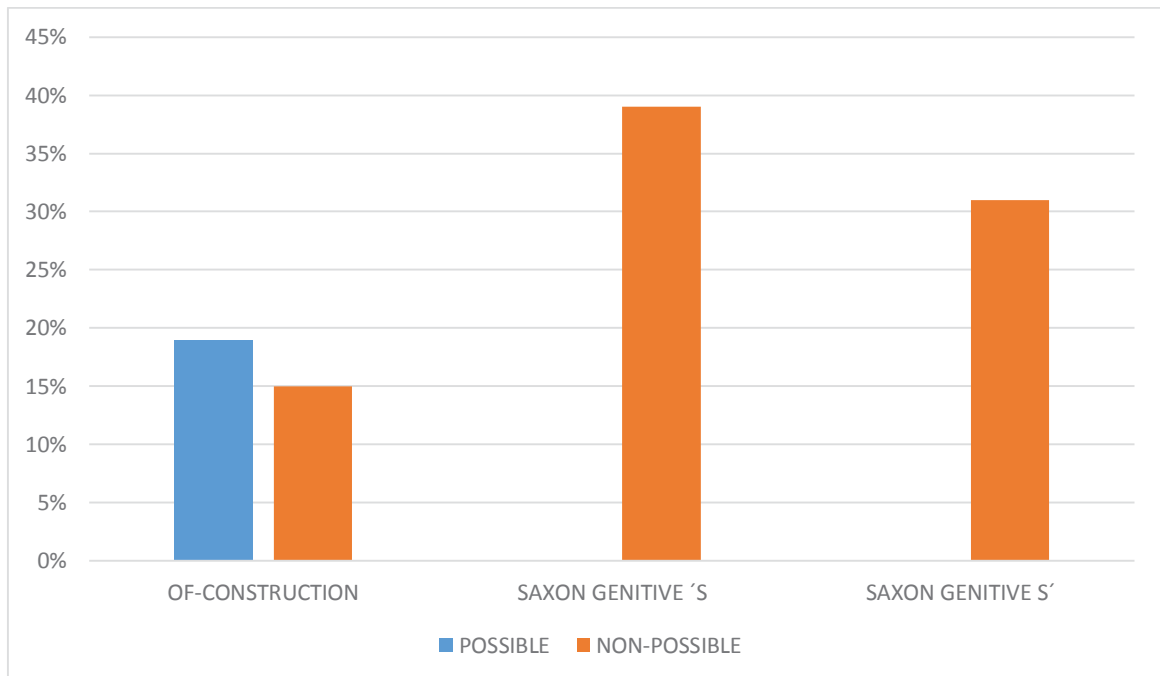
Graph 2: unexpected responses in the translation task.

4.2.2. MULTIPLE CHOICE DATA DESCRIPTION

The multiple choice task consists of 8 experimental groups of 3 constructions. These 8 experimental groups are divided into 3 groups: 4 cases of the two possessive constructions (*of*-construction and Genitive Saxon construction), 2 cases with the Genitive inflection - 's and 2 more cases with -s'. As in the translation task, responses were classified in two groups: target-like responses or non-target-like responses. In this case, as opposed to the translation task, the 4 instances with the possessive constructions admitted two possible responses.

As it is shown in graph 3, 66% of responses related to the possessive of were expected while the 34% of answers were unexpected. In relation to Saxon Genitive constructions with the orthographic issue - 's, 61% of responses were target-like and the other 39% were non-target-like responses. 69% of answers were expected Saxon Genitive constructions with -s' while 31% were non-expected.

Graph 4 represents possible and non-possible unexpected responses.

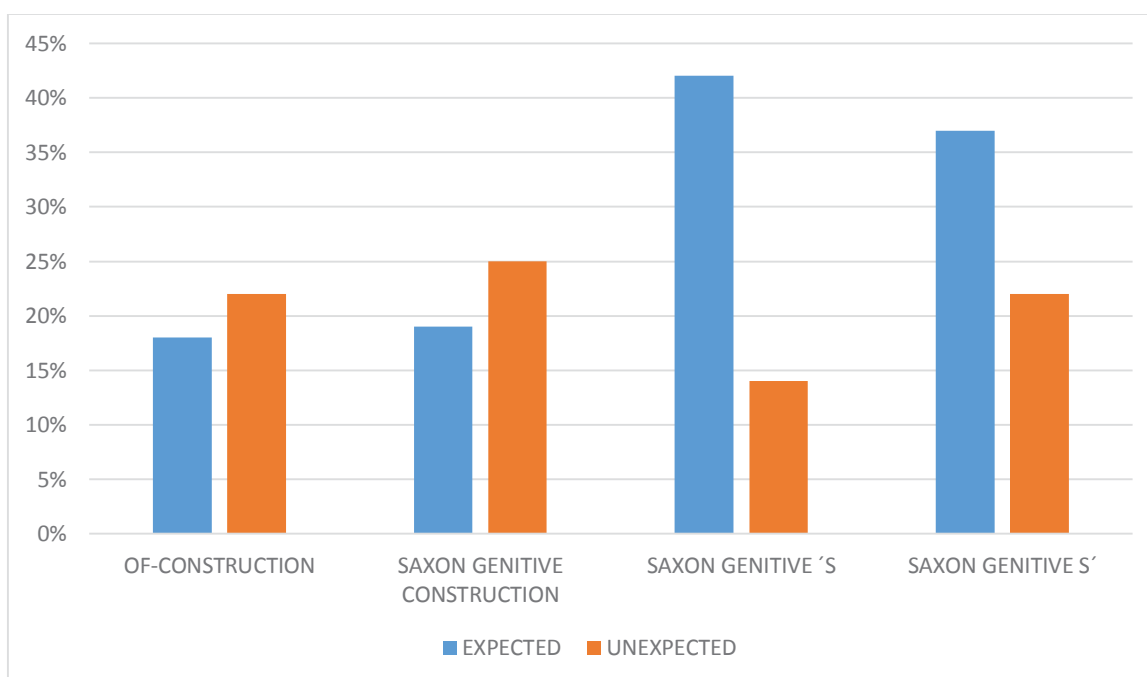


Graph 4: unexpected answers in the multiple choice task.

19% of responses related to the *of*-constructions were possible alternative constructions formed with the Saxon Genitive. The other 15% of responses related to the possessive of were non-possible or ungrammatical. The other two structures related to the Saxon Genitive construction with the orthographic issue - 's or -s' respectively did not allow any possible unexpected construction, therefore 39% of responses related to the orthographical issue - 's were ungrammatical and the 31% related to -s' were also ungrammatical.

4.2.3. ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT DATA DESCRIPTION

The AJ task consists of 16 experimental structures divided into four groups: 4 cases with the *of*-construction, 4 cases with the Saxon Genitive construction, 4 cases with the orthographical concern - 's and 4 cases with -s'. Graph 5 shows the classification of the AJ data in terms of expected and non-expected responses.

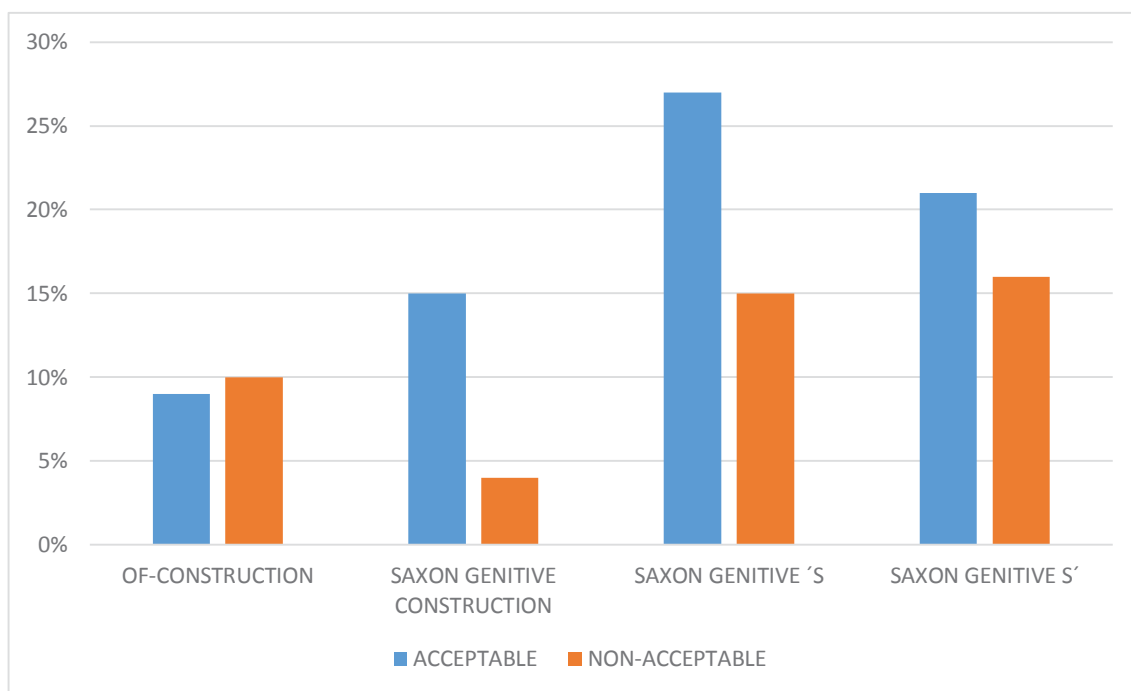


Graph 5: expected vs unexpected responses in the AJ task.

18% of responses with the *of*-construction were expected while 22% of them were unexpected. 19% of the answers related to the Saxon Genitive construction were expected and 25% were non-target-like. In relation to orthographical concerns (- 's and -s'), 42% of responses with the Saxon Genitive construction - 's were expected and the other 14%

of them were unexpected whereas expected responses with s' were 37% and unexpected responses were 22%.

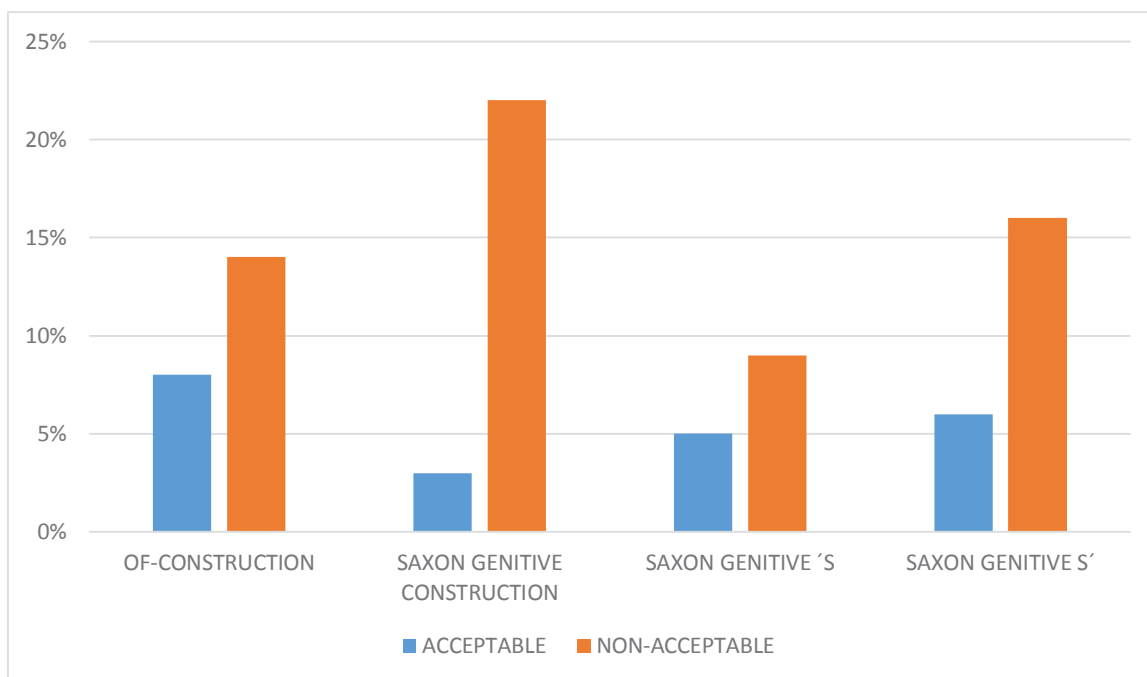
Graph 6 is concerned only with expected responses. Given that in the AJ task some structures were acceptable (and should be given a 4) and some other unacceptable (and should be given a 1), this is the distinction captured in graph 6.



Graph 6: expected responses in the AJ task.

It shows the percentages of acceptable responses (rated with a 4) that were expected and those unacceptable responses (1) that also were expected. As this graph indicates, 9% of the answers were acceptable whereas 10% of them were unacceptable in the 4 cases of the *of*-construction. In the other 4 cases of the Saxon Genitive construction, 15% of responses were acceptable and 4% unacceptable. The two groups that deal with the orthographical issues (- 's and -s') show 27% of acceptable responses with - 's and 15% of unacceptable responses; and 21% with -s' represent acceptable answers and 16% unacceptable ones.

Graph 7 deals with non-expected responses and shows the classification in terms of unacceptable structures rated as if they were acceptable (i.e. with a 4) and acceptable responses rated as if they were unacceptable (i.e. with a 1).



Graph 7: unexpected responses in the AJ task.

In relation to the 4 cases of the *of*-construction, 8% of responses were acceptable and 14% unacceptable. The 4 cases of Saxon Genitive constructions corresponded 3% to acceptable responses and 22% to unacceptable ones. The 4 structures with the orthographical issue - 's were 5% acceptable responses and 9% unacceptable. And the last 4 cases with the other orthographical concern -s' were answered as 6% acceptable whereas 16% as unacceptable.

4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

After having presented the data in section 4.2 above, this section focuses on the data analysis in each task and on the discussion of the different results obtained from each task in relation to the research questions presented in section 3. In the discussion I will compare results from the three tasks with the aim of reaching some conclusions as the final stage of this study.

4.3.1. TRANSLATION DATA ANALYSIS

The translation task is a production task that involves a transfer of information from the source language (Spanish) into the target language (English). In the specific case of possession structures, participants had to produce turn the Spanish DP-P-DP structures

into either the English DP-P-DP structure or the DP's-DP Saxon Genitive structure. As shown in section 3 above, it is remarkable that some errors regarding possessive structures are committed due to cross-linguistic influence. Besides errors in this task are not only related to this property, but also to other grammar aspects such as word order, orthographical issues, etc. Next, I will make a detailed analysis of all the results obtained from their translation task taking the different hypotheses that could be derived from the research questions presented in section 3.

- A general overview comparing both expected and unexpected results (graph 1). In the 4 cases where the *of*-construction was expected as a response, there is no difference between expected and unexpected responses which means that half of the participants do not have a clear idea about when choosing the possessive of structure. However, in the 4 cases where the Genitive construction was expected there is a difference of 14% between expected and non-expected answers. In the 8 cases related to orthographical concerns, there is clearly a difference between target-like responses with - 's and expected response with -s'. Participants tend to produce the Saxon Genitive construction with the normal inflection - 's even if the noun possessor is in plural probably because their lack of knowledge about this lexical rule.

- Most participants are able to detect and produce a possessive structure in English. This has been confirmed. Results indicate that at least more than a half of the participants are able to identify a possessive structure and produce this structure in their L2 (graph 1).

- Participants choose the *of*-construction in a higher degree than the Genitive one. This is not confirmed. At least in this first task, participants tend to choose in a higher degree the Genitive construction instead of the *of*-construction, contrary to what I expected.

- Participants tend to choose possible alternative structures in a higher degree than non-possible unexpected structures.

Some structures had the possibility of being answered with the two possessive constructions, so that the *of*-construction was as valid as the Genitive one. Therefore, this

hypothesis is rejected because the percentage of non-possible answers keeps being higher than the one of possible responses. But, participants, as it is shown in graph 2, tend to choose in a higher level possible alternative Saxon Genitive constructions instead of *of*-constructions.

- The Genitive construction is more difficult to produce and recognize than the *of*-construction.

Results show that participants produce Genitive constructions in a higher degree (graph 2) than the *of*-construction. So this hypothesis is not confirmed given the results obtained for this specific task.

- There would be errors not only related to the choice of using a possessive structure but also to the arrangement of the Saxon Genitive construction.

Participants make notable mistakes in the arrangement of the Genitive construction related to the Genitive inflection or to the word order of this structure so this hypothesis receives confirmation with the translation task data. Many of them place the inflection wrongly after the thing possessed instead of after the DP possessor as in [12a]. They also constantly have lexical problems - 's and -s', a fact that could also be attributed to lack of instruction of this specific feature. In example [12b] the participant adds the inflection - 's to a plural noun.

[12a] *¿Cuál es el nombre de tu madre?*

**What is your mum name 's?*

[12b] *Mi hermano compra comida de gatos.*

**My brother buys cats 's food.*

- There would be errors related to cross-linguistic influence from the participants' L1.

This hypothesis is rejected because, although I expected more errors in the production of the Genitive construction than in the *of*-construction one due to the influence of Spanish at the time of choosing one of them, participants still make mistakes producing *of*-structures that are not correct in English, as in [11a] and [11b].

[11a] *Los primos de Peter y Tom son altos.*

**The cousins of Peter and Tom are tall.*

[11b] *La casa de mis padres es bonita.*

**The house of my parents is beautiful.*

4.3.2. MULTIPLE CHOICE DATA ANALYSIS

This is a choice task which involves taking decisions on whether one possessive option or another is the appropriate one. Participants have to decide according to their knowledge about possession in the English language the correct option among three different structures. There are 8 groups of three different structures in each and each group may have one correct answer or two correct answers.

- A general overview of the whole graph comparing target-like and non-target-like results.

It can be seen in graph 3 that more than half of the participants choose expected answers instead of unexpected, and they tend to choose the *of*-construction in a higher degree than the Genitive one. And remarkably they are more likely to detect a lexical error in the Genitive inflection *-s* when choosing instead of when producing this kind of structure. In this task, the percentages of correct answers and errors is very representative because there is a notable difference between them, which means that participants are more efficient at choosing a correct response than at producing by themselves a possessive structure.

- Participants tend to choose in a higher level possible alternative responses than non-possible unexpected responses.

The multiple choice task consists of 4 groups of 3 cases related to the Genitive construction and to the *of*-construction and two of these 3 cases are correct. However, I only classified as expected responses those with the *of*-construction case, while the responses with the Genitive construction case were classified as possible alternative structures. As graph 4 shows, this possible alternative construction (Saxon Genitive construction) appears only in the case of the possessive *of* because in the case of the orthographical issues (*-s* and *-s'*) there is only one correct option, the other two options are wrong. Therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed because in the case of the

of-construction, there are more participants that choose the possible alternative Genitive construction than participants that choose a non-possible option.

- There would be errors committed in this task more specifically in the non-possible unexpected responses.

This hypothesis is confirmed. Errors committed in this task are related to the arrangement of the Saxon Genitive structure, the word order as well as the Genitive inflection and also to the choice of a possessive structure when it is not appropriate. There is a high percentage of participants who choose non-possible responses. In the 4 cases related to the orthographical issue of the Genitive, many participants do not identify ungrammatical options with a lexical problem (*s's*), as in the example [13a] where many participants choose the option B, or they tend to choose options with the *of*-construction which in these cases is non-possible as in option B in [13b]. Their preference for the *of*-construction structure could be caused by their Spanish influence at the time of choosing the correct structure.

[13a] A. The boy is buying dogs' food.

B. **The boy is buying dogs's food.*

C. **The boy is buying food of dogs.*

[14b] A. The Birthday party is at John's house.

B. **The Birthday party is in the house of John.*

C. **The Birthday party is at house's John.*

- Most participants are able to decide which is the correct option.

This is confirmed. In general, most participants at least have a minimum of 4 correct answers from a total of 8, but just a group of 10 participants give the two required correct answers in those 4 groups of structures.

4.3.3. ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT DATA ANALYSIS

The AJ task is a judgment task in which participants have to judge the degree of acceptability of a particular possessive structure. It consists of 16 experimental structures dealing with the 4 major cases stated in this empirical study. This task gives evidence of

the ability of participants to detect both acceptable or unacceptable English possession structures and it also assesses their capacity to make judgments in a task.

- General overview of the expected and unexpected results in graph 5.

As a general overview (graph 5), percentages in this task are very low which means that not so many participants give the expected responses (4 for acceptable or 1 for unacceptable). They tend to choose middle options (3 or 2) showing their insecurities at the time of judging the structures. The results obtained indicate that in relation to the *of*-construction and to the Genitive one, the percentage of unexpected responses is higher than the one of expected answers. But in the Genitive constructions with the orthographical issues (- 's and -s'), there is a notable difference between the percentage of expected and unexpected responses being higher in the case of expected results. This means participants are more accurate when judging the acceptability of Saxon Genitive constructions in terms of the Genitive inflection (- 's or -s') and they are able to identify lexical errors in the formation of the Saxon Genitive structure.

- Participants detect acceptability in a higher degree than unacceptability. Graphs 6 and 7.

This hypothesis is confirmed. Both graphs 6 and 7 represent the degree of acceptability in the participant's responses, graph 6 focuses on the acceptability of correct answers and graph 7 on the acceptability of wrong responses. Comparing results of both graphs, it could be said that participants detect acceptability in a higher degree than unacceptability. Participants are more able to detect acceptability than unacceptability.

- Participants are able to identify unacceptability in the Genitive construction in a higher degree than in the *of*-construction. Graph 6.

Acceptable expected responses are those expected responses that participants marked with a 4 which means they are perfectly correct while non-acceptable expected responses are those expected responses marked by participants with a 1. Then, this hypothesis is rejected because results in graph 6 show that in the three cases of the Saxon Genitive constructions participants are more capable of identifying the acceptability of

experimental structures in a higher degree than unacceptability while in the case of *of*-construction they identify unacceptability in a higher degree than acceptability.

- Judging a possessive structure creates more problems than judging an orthographic issue.

This hypothesis is confirmed. As graph 5 shows, clearly the *of*-construction and the Genitive construction are structures that cause more controversy in the participant's decision. They do not have notions about their differences and when to use one possessive structure or the other and, therefore, they are not able to judge structures correctly. That is, they make mistakes when deciding whether marking a structure as perfectly correct (4) or totally wrong (1) which led them to be uncertain and cause them to choose options 3 or 2.

- They tend to detect acceptability in the *of*-constructions in a lesser degree than in the Genitive constructions.

This hypothesis is confirmed. Participants, as graph 6 indicates, tend to identify acceptable structures with the *of*-construction in a lesser degree than in the Genitive construction. Again, participants show their lack of knowledge about possession in English, they do not know in which cases they have to use the *of*-construction and in which cases the Genitive construction.

- Participants tend to choose more perfectly correct responses (4) or just correct ones (3).

This hypothesis is rejected. Just a low number of participants choose expected responses (4). They tend to choose more preferably correct ones (3) which denotes uncertainty because they detect the acceptability of the structure but they are not able to detect that the structure is perfectly correct.

- Participants tend to choose more ungrammatical responses (1) or just partially wrong (2).

This hypothesis is also rejected because it happens the same that in the previous point; participants tend to choose more incorrect responses (2) rather than completely wrong

responses (1) which are the expected ones. Again, this indicates their ability to identify unacceptability but also their ambivalence on this topic.

- The percentage in the 2 cases concerned with the orthographical issues (- 's and -s') is higher than in the 2 cases with the possessive constructions. Why does it happen? Graph 5.

This hypothesis is confirmed. As graph 5 represents, percentages of Genitive constructions regarding the orthographical issues (- 's and -s') are higher than those regarding both possessive constructions. This indicates that participants are better at identifying acceptability regarding the orthographic issues than at differentiating whether an *of*-construction or a Genitive construction is well used. It could be explained by their bad command of this property of the English grammar in spite of their knowledge about lexical rules on the formation of the Genitive structure.

4.4. COMPARISON ACROSS TASKS

Three tasks have been presented, described and analyzed so far in this study: the multiple choice task and the AJ task which involve participants to choose among and to judge different types of possessive structures respectively and the translation task in which participants have to produce a possessive structure from their L1 into their L2. As these three tasks involve different competences (i.e. production and their ability to judge grammaticality in English possessive constructions), the results obtained have not been the same across tasks, there are some remarkable differences and these are explained in this section.

4.4.1. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TRANSLATION TASK AND THE MULTIPLE CHOICE TASK

The comparison between these two tasks involves three specific issues: the type of task and what each task requires; the different errors produced by participants; and specific lexical errors associated to these tasks. These issues are detailed below.

- Production versus choice task: the translation task is a production task in which participants show their competence on the realization of an English possessive

structure. Here, they show their ability to construct an English structure and their shortages when producing an English structure. However, the multiple choice task does not indicate participant's competence in the production in English but rather their capacity to choose the correct possessive structure among three options. Comparing results in both tasks, participants are more accurate in the multiple choice which means they are better at choosing the grammatical possessive structure than at producing a grammatical possessive structure.

- Different errors: in the translation task participants tend to produce more Genitive constructions than *of*-constructions even when these are being used wrongly which regarding the results of the other two tasks could mean that they have acquired this English property as something mechanical and use it whenever a possessive structure is appreciated. They are not able to differentiate when to use *of*-construction or Genitive one when dealing with possession in English. Nevertheless, results in the multiple choice task show that participants prefer to choose an *of*-construction option in a higher degree than a Genitive one. This preference is possible outcome of the cross-linguistic factor because of their condition of being native Spanish speakers; that is, they tend to choose the *of*-construction in order to express possession because they are familiarized with it.
- Lexical problems: at dealing with the Saxon Genitive construction in the translation task, participants make mistakes in the formation of this structure in the Genitive inflection. These mistakes related to the arrangement of the Genitive construction are committed in the cases where the inflection -'s has to be added to a plural noun. Participants do not know lexical rules in the Genitive formation and they are not able to produce Genitive structures with this characteristic properly. As graph 1 shows, Genitive structures characterized by this orthographical issue obtained more unexpected responses than expected ones. And comparing these results with the multiple choice task, participants commit more errors related to the Genitive inflection in the choice task than in the judgment task. A fact that points to a difference associated to the type of task. They are able to recognize an error in the Genitive inflection, but they do not realize this lexical property when they are producing language.

4.4.2. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TRANSLATION TASK AND THE ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT TASK.

The comparison between these two tasks involves two specific issues: the type of task and what each task requires; and specific lexical errors associated to these tasks. These issues are detailed below.

- Production versus judgment: results in the AJ task show that participants are better at judging than at producing possessive constructions, and that participants detect acceptability (3 or 4) in a higher degree than unacceptability (1 or 2). Although participants have the same problems in their preference of choice for an *of*-construction or a Genitive construction, they still make more correct answers than mistakes. These results confirm my proposal that participants tend to use the Genitive construction as a mechanic device because of the contradictory results obtained from the multiple choice and the AJ task. In the judgment tasks participants' preference is the PP expression of possession due to cross-linguistic influence whereas in the production task their preference is the Genitive structure.
- Lexical problems: errors related to the formation of the Genitive construction are made in participants' production in the translation task in a higher degree than in the AJ task. They have a lack of knowledge about the lexical rule on how to construct a Genitive structure with the inflection 's and they make more mistakes when producing this structure than when judging a structure with this feature. Participants are better at judging the grammaticality of a possessive structure rather than at producing a grammatical structure with the orthographical issue (-'s). And they are more able to detect the acceptability of structures with an orthographic issue in a higher degree than an *of*-construction or a Genitive one in the AJ task. In the translation task as I mentioned above, participants tend to make many errors dealing with the orthographical concern (-'s) and with the word order of the Genitive construction.

4. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has offered a comparative analysis of the two constructions expressing possession in English. In order to do so, data from L1 Spanish / L2 English speakers have

been collected using three different tasks (i.e. translation, multiple choice and acceptability judgment) in which the two constructions (i.e. Saxon Genitive and *of*-construction) and the two lexical-orthographic variations (i.e. -'s and -s') were captured. Once these data were obtained, its analysis has pointed to four main conclusions reached from several hypotheses as discussed in section 4.3.

This study has shown participants' difficulty in the ability to use and select a Genitive construction or an *of*-construction. Participants do not know how to distinguish whether a Genitive construction or an *of*-construction is required and they tend to choose in a higher degree the *of*-construction. This might be related to the teaching method used to present possessive constructions in English as well as to possible cross-linguistic influence from their L1, as I will suggest below.

Data have provided different results when producing and when judging. Participants have more difficulties producing a correct structure than judging a correct structure. They are able to produce Genitive constructions but they usually commit errors in the formation of this structure. However, when judging they are more capable of recognizing the correct structure in terms of its arrangement.

As native speakers of Spanish, cross-linguistic influence is reflected in participants' preferences. There is an overextension in the choice of prepositional constructions given that these are the ones that express possession in Spanish. Besides, in the production tasks, transfer from their L1 (Spanish) into their L2 (English) occurs as a consequence of this phenomenon.

As a possible solution to this problem in the acquisition of the possession in L2 English, a different approach is needed in the classroom to improve the students' output about this property.

The teaching method in the classroom about this grammar property is proven to be not appropriate. Actually, there is no specific instruction on the Saxon Genitive construction. Students do not know the differences between the two possessive constructions in terms of their use in context because they have never been taught about it. Besides, the grammar

book they use in class deals with this property but does not provide explanations about when and how to use the Saxon Genitive or about the formation of the Saxon Genitive.

Therefore, the expression of possession in English reveals itself as a difficult aspect in the grammar of English in L2 acquisition contexts. However, the difficulty does not only lie in the similarities and differences between English and Spanish, but also in the type of instruction participants receive. The teaching method used to explain this property at school should perhaps be re-oriented into a more communicative one where the actual properties are presented, discussed and used.

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AFTERWORD: OBJECTIVES REACHED

With this study I believe I have reached two of the most important objectives as in the official description of the English degree (2009, 13-14) which are the following: (1) to provide a complete learning process in linguistics, culture and literature of the English language and (2) to achieve a solid instrumental competence in English in a general environment but also in a professional one. These two objectives are related to the present dissertation in the two paragraphs that follow.

This study has given me the opportunity to put into practice aspects that I have learned in different courses throughout the degree. These involve mainly the following:

- Grammatical background: English grammar I, II, and III (first and second year).
- Comparative grammatical background: English/Spanish comparative grammar (third year).
- Methods for the analysis of English: academic English (second year), technologies of information and communication (fourth year).

Also, I have been able to combine these aspects and to relate them to two main professional fields in our degree: teaching and research. As I have suggested along my dissertation, the grammatical analysis of aspects that are problematic for learners (such as the Saxon Genitive construction) can have an effect on teaching strategies and methodologies and this may reduce the effect of transfer or errors. Also, because my study is based on the analysis of empirical data, it is also linked to a specific research methodology used in the fields of bilingual acquisition, L2 acquisition and language learning.