

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

THE GENITIVE ALTERNATION IN ESTONIAN LEARNER
ENGLISH – A FORCED CHOICE TASK

Ba thesis

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ABSTRACT

The genitive variation in English is a well researched subject. For example, it is grammatically correct to either say *the girl's pink dress* or *the pink dress of the girl*. However, most of the previous work on genitive alternation has been done only among the native speakers of English. This current thesis deals with the genitive variation as well, but takes a look at the non-native speakers of English, to be more precise, Estonian learners of English. A comparison between the native and the non-native speakers is also provided. The thesis reports the results of a forced choice task carried out with advanced learners of English whose native language is Estonian.

The thesis is divided into seven sections. The overview of the whole thesis is provided in the introduction. The introduction is followed by a short discussion of what the genitive variation is and what are the factors that contribute to the choice between the different variants. Next, there is a summary of a few studies that deal with the genitive variation among the native speakers and a summary of Anette Rosenbach's study (2005) on which this current thesis is based. The fifth, sixth and seventh sections of this thesis deal with the forced choice questionnaire that was conducted among the Estonian learners of English and the discussion of the results. The thesis ends with the conclusion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this research is the genitive variation among the non-native speakers of English. The thesis discusses what factors affect the choice between the two main genitive variations (the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive) which are actually considered synonymous since there is no difference in the meaning of the variations (both are grammatically correct) in some contexts, only in wording. I decided to choose this research topic, since the genitive variation is well researched among the native speakers, but not among the non-native speakers. To get a better overview of the genitive variation in non-native English, a forced choice questionnaire based on Anette Rosenbach study (2005) was conducted for this research to show what choices the Estonian learners of English make and to compare the results to the native speakers.

The aim of the study was to see if the predictions made about the factors that affect the choice between the two constructions for the native speakers will also be important for non-native speakers. The study focuses on two factors: the effect of animacy and the effect of weight. For example, in some of the earlier researches, it has been found, that animate possessors favor the *s*-genitive and inanimate possessors favor the *of*-genitive. It has also been found, that native speakers prefer the end-weight, meaning that if the possessor was longer, the phrase would prefer the *of*-genitive, which has the possessor at the end of the phrase.

In the first section of the thesis, I will explain all of the terminology used in this research and also to explain the factors that have a role in the choice of genitives. The methodological problems will also be discussed. In the second section I will give an overview of Anette Rosenbach's study (2005), who conducted a questionnaire on the genitive variation among the native speakers of English. The third section deals with the genitive alteration in

learner English, mostly based on a research done by Gries and Wulff (2013), who compared the genitive alteration of Chinese, German and native speakers of English. In the fifth, sixth and seventh sections, the experimental design, and the results of the questionnaire that was conducted for this thesis will be discussed, also there will be provided a comparison to the researches mentioned above. The thesis ends with a conclusion.

2. A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE GENITIVE VARIATION IN ENGLISH

The parallel usage of the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive is usually referred to as the 'genitive variation'. It consists of the 'possessor' and the 'possessum' which can occur in different positions in English genitive constructions. For example, in a phrase *the girl's pink dress* or *the pink dress of the girl*, the possessor is *the girl* and the possessum is *(the) pink dress*. In the first case, the possessor is placed in the beginning of the phrase, while in the second case, the possessor is placed at the end of the phrase. According to Rosenbach (2014: 216), who gives a recent comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art of research about the genitive alternation in the journal *English Language and Linguistics*, the case of genitive variation is well researched and many factors have been found that affect which of the genitive variants are chosen in different occasions and why.

Historically, the shift from Old English to Middle English is crucial, when the inflectional genitive was being replaced by the *of*-genitive (Rosenbach 2014: 216). From late Middle English, the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive have been the two main competing genitive constructions (Rosenbach 2014: 221). In the 1960s, with the rise of sociolinguistics it was discovered that the choice between the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive is not random for speakers as the choice between the genitives is affected by different factors (Rosenbach 2014: 216).

The first extensive study on the topic of the genitive variation is written by Altenberg (1982). The study focuses on the English of the seventeenth-century. It shows how the genitive variation at that time was determined by the combination of many different factors, including animacy, weight, semantic relation and genre. In the middle of the twentieth century, the focus shifted from earlier English to Modern English (Rosenbach 2014: 217).

There are many methodological problems concerning the study of genitive variation with one of the problems being ‘sameness’. The question of interest is whether *the girl’s pink dress* and *the pink dress of the girl* mean exactly the same thing, or do they have a different meaning. There are two standpoints to the issue, one would be that the two constructions are not supposed to be looked at as genitive variation, since they have different constructional meaning. The other position is to assume sameness on the propositional level in that both constructions convey, very generally, the relation between a possessor and a possessed entity (Rosenbach 2014: 221). The “sameness” of the two constructions depends on the context, because there are contexts in which the *s*-genitive cannot be expressed by a corresponding *of*-genitive and vice versa (Rosenbach 2014: 223). For example, only *s*-genitives with a specifying function can be turned into *of*-genitives. *The young child’s book* can be turned into *the book of the young child*, but *an old children’s book* cannot be expressed by the *of*-genitive, since the meaning would change to *an old book of children*, but it should be *an old book for children*. Many of the *of*-genitives cannot be turned into *s*-genitives either. For example, if one was to paraphrase *a man of honour* it would make *an honourable man*, not *an honour’s man*. (Rosenbach 2014: 222-223).

It is important to keep in mind, that not all of the contexts with either *s*-genitives or *of*-genitives can form genitive variations. Such cases cannot be included in the analysis, where both genitive variations could not be used, because they do not correspond with each other. It is important to take into consideration the meaning and the structure of the genitive constructions, not to just include some random examples. Most of the genitive constructions are of categorical contexts, so the phrases have to be very carefully researched and thought over, before including them as genitive constructions of choice contexts, meaning that there is a possibility to choose between different variations, without changing the concept

(Rosenbach 2014: 223). Figure 1 shows how many of the *of*-genitives and *s*-genitives are of categorical contexts and that there is only a small part that is of choice contexts.

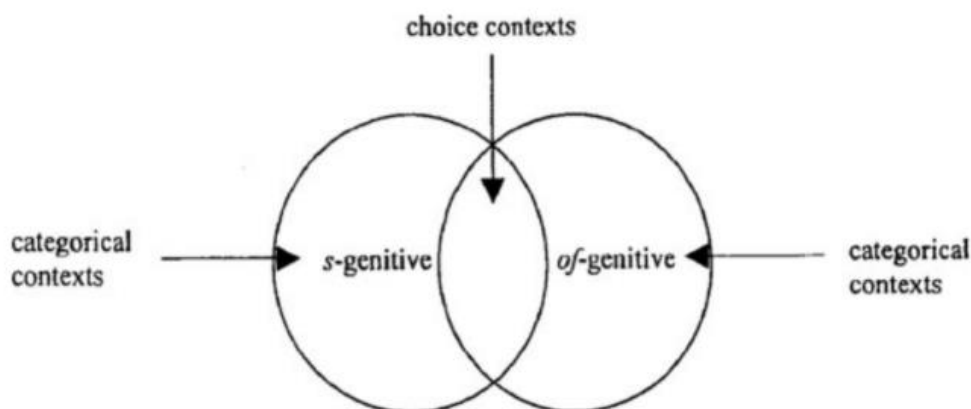


Figure 1. Categorical versus choice contexts in genitive variation (Rosenbach 2014: 223).

There are many factors that can contribute to the choice of any word variations, such as animacy, definiteness, givenness, weight and rhythmic alternation (Rosenbach 2014: 225). Some of these are more significant when talking about the genitive variation specifically. In the present study, two factors are considered in detail – animacy and weight. Following is a short overview of how these two factors have been found to affect the choice between the two genitive variants. In order to do justice to other factors, a brief overview is given of some of these as well.

2.1 Animacy

One of the most important factors that plays a role in the English genitive variation is animacy. The choice of genitive construction depends on if the object is animate or inanimate and more specifically belonging to more complex categories like 'human', 'organisation', 'animal', 'place', 'time', 'concrete inanimate', 'non-concrete inanimate', 'machines', 'vehicles' etc (Rosenbach 2014: 226).

Another pertinent question would be, whose animacy is more relevant, the animacy of the possessor or the animacy of the possessum? Most of the studies focus on the animacy of the possessor, but the importance of the animacy of the possessum has been suggested as well in the literature (see e.g. Hawkins 1981, cited in Rosenbach 2014: 226). If the animacy of both the possessor and possessum is considered, animates should come before inanimates in a possessive construction, meaning that in the *s*-genitive the animate possessor + inanimate possessum would be favoured (for example, *John's car*) and in the case of the *of*-genitive, animate possessum + inanimate possessor would be favoured (for example, *the owner of the car*). There have only been a few studies on the distribution of the animacy of the possessor and the possessum for the two genitives. The construction of an inanimate possessor and an animate possessum would not be possible, because possessors are mostly animate (Rosenbach 2014: 226).

It is stated in numerous studies on the genitive variation that animacy is one of the most relevant properties, because animate possessors prefer the *s*-genitive while the inanimate possessors prefer the *of*-genitive (e.g. Gries 2002, Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007, Rosenbach 2005, Szmrecsanyi 2010, Wolk et al. 2013). An example from the present research would be that *the boy's eyes* is preferred over *the eyes of the boy* because boy in this case is a human (animate) possessor, and as stated in Gries and Wulff (2013), it is therefore more compatible with the *s*-genitive's semantics. But in the case of inanimate possessors, the *of*-genitive is preferred over the *s*-genitive, for example *the lid of the casket* is preferred over *the casket's lid*, where *casket* is the inanimate possessor.

2.2 Syntactic weight

The other important factor that plays a role in the genitive variation is syntactic weight (Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007, Jankowski and Tagliamonte 2014, Rosenbach

2005, Smrecsanyi 2010). Most studies use the number of words, phrases or characters when studying the genitive variation and the possible effect of weight on the choice between the two variants. The length of possessor and possessum as individual variables has also been analysed to study genitive variation (Rosenbach 2014: 227). While weight is usually defined syntactically in studies on grammatical variation, there is a long-standing tradition in psycholinguistic research of defining it phonologically in terms of number of syllables (Rosenbach 2014: 228). For example, syntactically, *the man's book* and *the schoolmaster's book* have the same length, but phonologically *the schoolmaster's book* is longer. Both number of syllables and number of words have been looked at by Börjars et al. (2013) and they came to the conclusion that these variables have similar results. It is also possible that syntactic and phonological weight could even be independent factors not just two competing definitions of weight.

According to several studies on the genitive alteration, the English speakers prefer the *end-weight*, which means that NPs with heavier possessors (for example, *the eyes of the small girl*) are predicted to prefer the *of-genitive*, since that way the possessor with the heavy weight would be placed at the end of the phrase (Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007, Rosenbach 2005, Smrecsanyi 2010). An alternative view is also provided, which shows the speaker's sensitivity to 'syntactic branching', meaning that the postmodified possessed NPs prefer the *s-genitive*, while postmodified possessor NPs prefer the *of-genitive* (Gries, Wulff 2013: 333).

2.3 Other important factors

Besides animacy and weight, there are other numerous factors that have been shown to play a role in the genitive variation. Some of these will be discussed very briefly here. The choice between genitives is also different depending on what English speaking region is

currently under discussion. For example, there has been some research focusing on the differences between British and American English (e.g Jahr Sorheim 1980; Rosenbach 2002). It has been found that the use of *s*-genitive with inanimate nouns is more often used in the American English. Differences have also been found between New Zealand English and British English, concerning the strength of animacy: there are fewer *s*-genitives used with inanimate nouns in the New Zealand English (Hundt & Szmrecsanyi: 2012). These findings indicate that the effect strength of animacy is variable across varieties of English (Rosenbach 2014: 233). Gries & Wulff (2013) also point out that the genitive variation is different depending on which variety of English is currently talked about.

Many differences between the genitive choice have also been found in the written vs spoken language (Szmrecsanyi and Hinrichs 2008, Szmrecsanyi 2010). A study about Canadian English shows that there are strong differences between these two registers (Jankowski and Tagliamonte 2014). For example, *s*-genitives are almost always used with animate possessors and *of*-genitives with inanimate possessors in the spoken language. The study by Jankowski and Tagliamonte (2014) also shows that there is an increasing use of the *s*-genitives with non-human possessors in written language compared to spoken language. A study by Gries and Wulff (2013: 335) also states that recent researches show that extra-linguistic factors have an impact on the genitive alteration as well, since the *s*-genitive is more and more frequent both in the spoken and in the written language.

Another feature that is highlighted in the study conducted by Gries and Wulff (2013: 331) is ‘specificity’, meaning that the more specific part of the phrase will be in front of it, and the less specific parts would be following it. An example they give is *Jason’s research interests*, and in that case *Jason* is the more specific part of that phrase, but when a definite article is added to research interests, then the *of*-genitive would be just as acceptable (*the research interests of Jason*).

It cannot, however, be excluded, that the genitive alteration could also depend on what the speakers' have previously heard being used many times in the immediate context, meaning that if the speakers are used to hearing or using one genitive alteration in a specific case, they will continue using it (Gries, Wulff 2013: 333). This factor may also play a role in the present study, since it is possible that participants in the forced choice questionnaire learn during the experiment and their previous choices start affecting their next choices.

Factors, which are internal to language (e.g linguistic factors), apply to individual speakers. External factors, on the other hand, can operate between speakers; external factors are, for example, regional variety of English, modality (spoken versus written English) and text type (Rosenbach 2014: 230). Rosenbach (2014: 231) has also stated that it should be further noted that 'while some factors operate on local, inherent properties of the (possessor) referent, such as animacy, definiteness or the final sibilancy of the possessor, others depend on the context, such as givenness or persistence'.

Animacy is often considered the most important factor in the choice of genitive variation (e.g. Gries 2002, Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007; Rosenbach 2002, 2005; Szmrecsanyi 2010; Wolk et al. 2013), of course depending on which types of genitive variants are analysed. But although it is very influential, it should also always be kept in mind that all factors are important when determining genitive choice. Still, the stronger factors, such as animacy, tend to eliminate the influence of minor factors. The importance of minor factors, such as rhythm, only comes up in contexts which allow for more variation between the two variants. Everything depends on what type of factors are analysed and what type of context is chosen into the analysis, making the importance of the factors still relative to genitives individually (Rosenbach 2014: 231).

3. OVERVIEW OF ROSENBACH'S (2005) STUDY

Since the current research is based on the same ideas and the same experimental design which Rosenbach (2005) used in her research, it is important to further discuss how she conducted her questionnaire and what results did she get. The difference between this research and Rosenbach's research is, that Rosenbach's respondents were native English speakers, but the current research deals with advanced learners of English as a foreign language. There were thirty-nine subjects who took part in Rosenbach's experiment (questionnaire study) who were all monolingual native speakers of American English. Their task was to choose between the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive in the given contexts as spontaneously as possible. (Rosenbach 2005: 619).

Rosenbach's (2005) aim was to show how animacy, weight and possessive relations affect how the choice is made between the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive. For the experiment, Rosenbach (2005) chose contexts where both the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive could possibly be used. The texts were all taken from crime fiction novels. There were four conditions that Rosenbach included in her questionnaire: the neutral animate condition (*the boy's eyes/the eyes of the boy*), the long possessor/short head animate condition (*the dark man's hand/the hand of the dark man*), the short possessor/long head inanimate condition (*the hotel's elegant lobby/the elegant lobby of the hotel*), and the neutral inanimate condition (*the chair's frame/the frame of the chair*). The list of items used in Rosenbach's (2005) study is given in Appendix 1. The present experiment used the same items.

When putting together the experiment, Rosenbach (2005) also took into consideration the inalienable and alienable relations and how they would affect the choice of genitive. In an earlier study, Rosenbach (2002) discovered that the inalienable inanimate possessors are more likely to be used with the *s*-genitive (*the building's door*) than the

alienable possessors (*the bag's content*). Rosenbach included conditions where one would be animate (*the boy's eyes*) and the other one inanimate (*the chair's frame*), but they have the same weight (Rosenbach 2005: 619)

One of Rosenbach's (2005) predictions was that if animacy would be independent of weight, the s-genitive should be more frequent in the neutral animate condition than the neutral inanimate condition, if comparing conditions that only differ in animacy, not in weight. It means, that the s-genitive should be more frequent in cases like *the boy's eyes* than with cases like *the chair's frame*. It has also never been shown that weight could be an artifact of animacy, but if weight is independent from animacy, there should be less s-genitives in the animate long/short condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*) than in the animate neutral condition (for example, *the boy's eyes*) when comparing only conditions that differ in weight, not animacy. The third prediction was that if weight is more important than animacy, then the s-genitive would occur more in the inanimate long/short condition (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*) than in the animate long/short condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*). But if animacy is a stronger factor than weight, there should be more genitives in the animate long/short conditions (for example, *the dark man's hand*) than in the inanimate long/short conditions (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*). All together Rosenbach tested forty-one sentences and at least ten items per condition. (Rosenbach 2005: 620; see Appendix 1 for the list of items).

Rosenbach's (2005) results show that the s-genitive is used more in the animate neutral condition (for example, *the boy's eyes*), than in inanimate neutral conditions (for example, *the chair's frame*). Therefore, it is shown that there are animacy effects that do not depend on weight. The s-genitive is also more frequent in the animate neutral condition (for example, *the boy's eyes*) than in the animate long/short condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*), which shows that there are also weight effects that do not depend on animacy.

The frequency of *s*-genitive is also higher- for inanimate possessors if the possessor is short and the head long (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*), the *s*-genitive is also more frequent if the possessor is long (for example, *the dark man's hand* vs *the hand of the dark man*). Therefore the results show that animacy and weight are independent factors and neither can be reduced to the other and animacy can, to certain extent, be even more important than weight (Rosenbach 2005: 621). The aim of the present study is to test whether Estonian advanced learners of English are similarly sensitive to the effects of animacy and weight as native speakers of English are.

4. THE GENITIVE ALTERATION IN LEARNER ENGLISH

As can be seen from the discussion above, there has been a lot of research done on the genitive alteration in native speaker English, even so much that it can be considered the most researched of all syntactic alterations in English, as stated by Rosenbach (2014: 215). But there have been very few studies done amongst the non-native speakers of English concerning the genitive alternation. One such exception is a study by Stefan Th. Gries and Stefanie Wulff, "The genitive alternation in Chinese and German ESL learners. Towards a multifactorial notion of context in learner corpus research" (2013). Gries and Wulff (2013: 330). state even that "there is, to our knowledge, no corpus-based study to date on the genitive alteration in IL. Therefore, we here combine our interest to argue in favor of a methodologically complex approach to learner corpus research with the first exploration of the genitive alteration in German and Chinese IL."

The research carried out by Gries and Wulff (2013) highlights many good points about the factors that may have an impact on which genitive alteration is preferred. For the analysis, Gries and Wulff (2013) compared the genitive alteration between German, Chinese and English speakers. Overall, they analysed 2,986 different cases of genitive variation from

learner corpora. All of the cases were randomly chosen from three different corpora – The Chinese and German parts of the International Corpus of Learner English (version 2) and British component of the International Corpus of English (Gries, Wulff 2013: 336). Table 1 presents the overview of the corpus sample analysed by Gries and Wulff (2013).

	<i>of-genitive</i>	<i>s-genitive</i>	Totals
NNS: Chinese	872	118	990
NNS: German	892	104	996
NS: English	817	183	1000
Totals	2581	405	2986

Table 1. Distribution of genitives across the three samples (Gries, Wulff 2013: 336).

The results of the research done by Gries and Wulff (2013) were divided into two parts. Firstly, the results that focus on the aspects that both native and nonnative speakers have in common were discussed. All speakers were impacted by the segment alternation and tended to choose the genitive variant which results in the strictest possible alteration of consonants and vowels. The research also found, what was expected from the previous studies among the native speakers, that plural possessors do not prefer *s*-genitives. It is also stated that all of the speakers prefer to choose the short-before-long variant. The *s*-genitives are also preferred when the possessor is specific (paired with a definite article) and the possessed is not (paired with an indefinite article), and this tendency is the strongest when paired with the previous result mentioned, when the possessors are in the singular. This can be compared to the given-before-new order, meaning that at first the information that is already given is mentioned, and then some new information about it is provided. The specific possessor is (in most cases) the given information, and the non-specific possessed is the new information that supports the given. (Gries, Wulff 2013: 348-349)

The results of Gries and Wulff (2013) showed that there are not significant differences between the English and the Chinese speakers, since the languages are similar in some ways. However, there are some differences between the English and the German speakers – the German speakers have a much stronger tendency to use the *s*-genitive (Gries, Wulff 2013: 350). Based on these results, it could be assumed, that the results of the Estonian speakers will be more similar to the German speakers rather than Chinese speakers, since in Estonian language, the possessor always comes before the possessed (as it is in the case of the *s*-genitive).

5. THE EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN OF THE FORCED CHOICE QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN THIS STUDY

The present study uses the same experimental design as in Rosenbach (2005).¹ A questionnaire with different text excerpts was created, which include a part where genitive variation is possible. More specifically, these were 41 text excerpts from different crime novels. The details of the original study are available in Rosenbach's paper (2005). The list of the genitive contexts is given in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire used in the present study was created in Google Forms. Rosenbach (2005) did not clarify in her research if her questionnaire was conducted on paper or online. In the beginning, several background questions were asked from the respondents, including their age, sex, what are their current studies, what is their native language, what languages do they use at home and their father's/mother's native language. The respondents were then provided with one exercise question to show what the experiment was going to be like and then they had to proceed to the texts. The answers to the practice question were not included

¹ Anette Rosenbach was contacted by email and asked whether she would be willing to share her experimental stimuli. She kindly agreed to share her stimuli on the condition that it is not made publicly available. Hence, it is not possible to include the entire questionnaire with the contexts in the appendix; only the list of items is provided.

in the analysis of the results. It was also emphasized in the beginning that instead of relying on grammar books or their previous knowledge, they should only use their intuition and they should also keep in mind, that there are no wrong answers, since both genitive forms are correct to use. The respondents had to read a text excerpt and decide whether they should use a phrase including the *s*-genitive or the *of*-genitive in the gaps provided. An example item from the Google Form questionnaire is given in Figure 2.

Martin arrived at the cottage. He reached for the bell-pull and heard its jangle just inside the door. Standing below the porch he waited for the sound of her footsteps or her voice calling out. But nothing happened. Martin stepped back from the door and looked above [.....] *

- the gabled roof of the porch
- the porch's gabled roof

to a window on [.....]. Nothing moved behind the glass. *

- the cottage's first floor
- the first floor of the cottage

Figure 2. An example item from the Google Form questionnaire

The questionnaire was held open for a month and during this time 47 respondents filled in the questionnaire. 35 out of the respondents were female and 12 were male. All of the respondents were students of English language and literature, from the years 1 to 3. 26 of the respondents were first year students, 9 were second year students and 12 were third year students. The youngest respondent was 19 years old and the oldest was 37. As it turned out from the information gathered at the beginning of the questionnaire, almost all of the respondents had a fully Estonian language background, with only a few exceptions – in two

cases the respondent's mother's native language was Russian and in one case the respondent's father's native language was answered as unknown. It was decided not to exclude these participants from the study.

5.1 Predictions of the study

It was decided to use the same two predictions as Rosenbach (2005) did in her research. The central question is whether animacy and weight are independent factors and whether one is relatively more important than the other. In addition, the present study addresses the question of whether advanced learners of English make similar choices as do the native speakers.

Prediction 1: If animacy is an independent factor (without considering weight), then the *s*-genitive would be more frequent in the neutral human condition than in the neutral inanimate condition, meaning that the *s*-genitive would be more frequent in cases like *the boy's eyes* than in cases like *the chair's frame*. And if weight of the genitive variation is an independent factor, the *s*-genitives would be less frequent in the animate long/short condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*) than in the animate neutral condition (for example, *the boy's eyes*) (Rosenbach 2005:620).

Prediction 2: If weight is considered more important than animacy then the *s*-genitive would be more frequent in the inanimate short/long condition (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*) than in the animate condition with long possessor and short head (for example, *the dark man's hand*). If animacy is considered more important than weight, then there would be more genitives in the animate long/short condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*) than in the inanimate short/long condition (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*) (Rosenbach 2005: 620).

Prediction 3: Compared to native speakers of English, Estonian learners of English overuse the *s*-genitive construction. As it was highlighted in the study by Gries & Wulff (2013), *s*-

genitive is overused in the learner language of German speakers. Therefore, it can be predicted that Estonian speakers may overuse the *s*-genitive as well.

6. THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

To show the more significant results that the questionnaire provided and to analyse these results further, different tables were created in Excel using the “PivotTable” function. Based on the tables, bar plots were created. That way, it is easier to compare how different aspects may have impacted the choices that were made. The results in the figures are provided in percentages and all the figures are based on the different choices between the *s*-construction and the *of*-construction. The lighter columns show the *s*-constructions and the darker columns show the *of*-constructions.

All together, 5 different figures were created. All of the figures demonstrate one major finding of the study – overall, the *s*-genitive is chosen more frequently than the *of*-genitive. The *s*-genitive was chosen 1125 times and the *of*-genitive was chosen 841 times. It is important to note that both constructions were possible in each of the sentences.

First, some general results are discussed and then the influence of the two factors on the choice between the two genitive variants is looked at in detail, followed by a discussion on whether the choices made by Estonian speakers of English differ from native speakers.

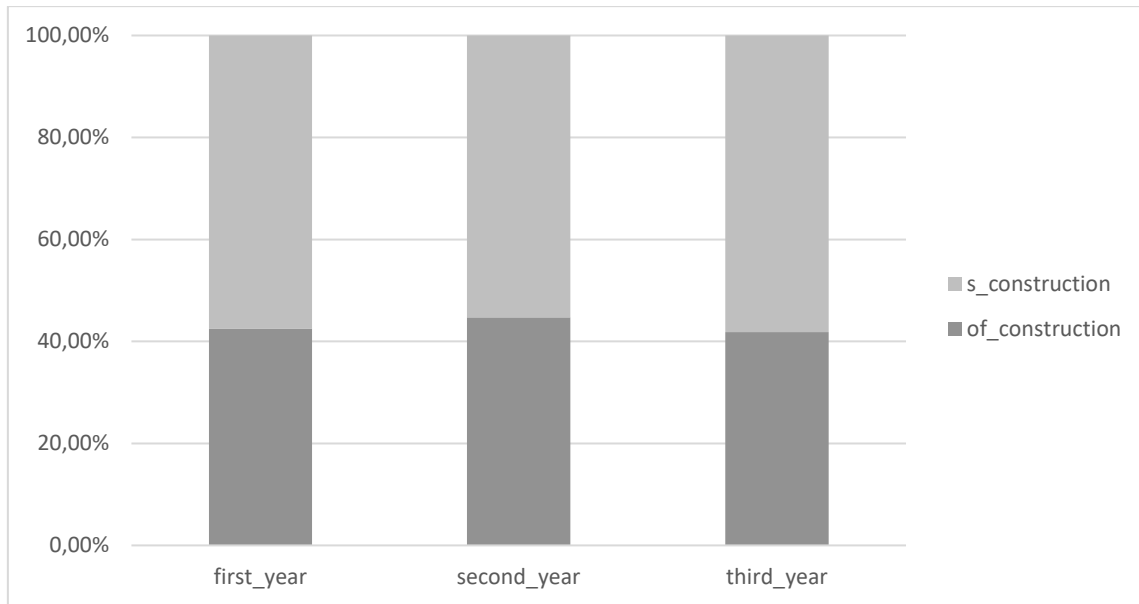


Figure 3. The use of *s*-genitive and *of*-genitive according to the respondents' year of study

As expected, the results were not that different when comparing the results of the first, second or third year students as can be seen from Figure 3. The first year students used the *of*-construction 42.5% of the time and the *s*-construction 57.5% of the time. The second year students used the *of*-construction 45% of the time and the *s*-construction was used 55% of the time. The third year students used the *of*-construction 42% of the time and the *s*-construction was used 58% of the time. There is a slight change of a few percentages between the second year students and the first/third year students, since the second year students used the *of*-construction slightly more compared to the first and third year students, but the difference is very small.

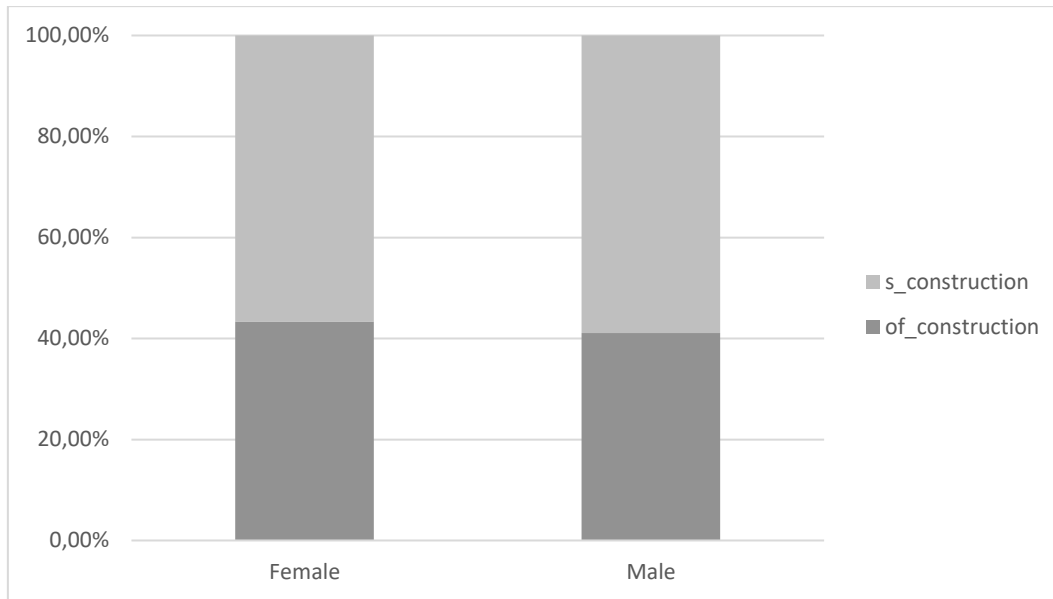


Figure 4. The use of *s*-genitive and *of*-genitive according to the sex of the respondents

There were also no major differences between the results of males and females, as seen from Figure 4; but one should be careful here, since there were significantly more female respondents. Still, if one was to compare the choices made by male and female respondents, the results in percentages are the following: the female respondents chose the *of*-construction 43% of the time and the *s*-construction 57% of the time. The male respondents chose the *of*-construction 41% and the *s*-construction 59% of the time. It is, however, very likely that even if more male respondents would have taken part in the questionnaire, the results would still be the same; the sex of the respondents does not seem to affect the results.

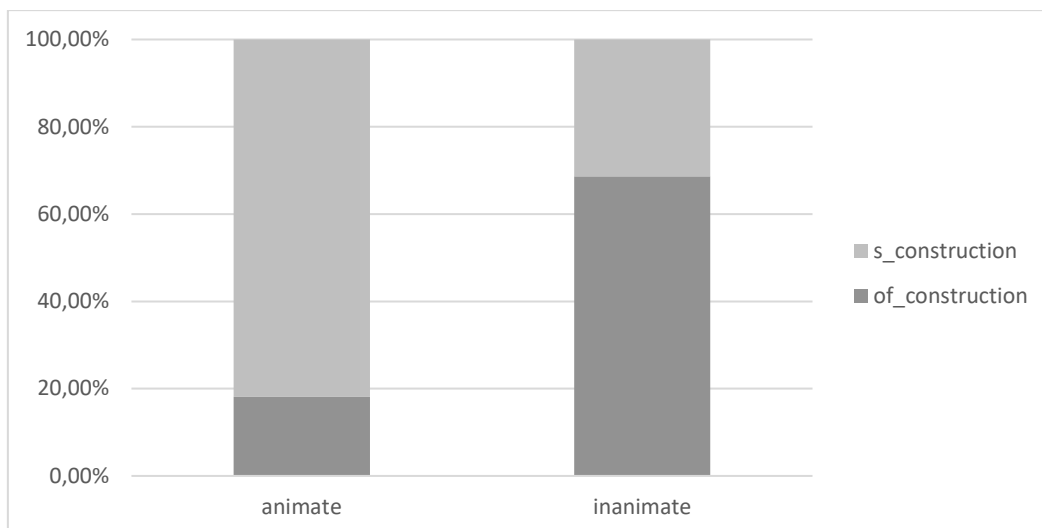


Figure 5. The use of the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive according to animacy

Figure 5 shows how remarkably different the results between the *s*-construction and the *of*-construction were in the animate and inanimate conditions. The *of*-construction in the animate condition (for example, *the hand of the Sergeant*) was chosen only 18% of the time, whereas the *s*-construction in the animate condition (for example, *the boy's mother*) was chosen 82% of the time.

The results in the inanimate condition, however, are the other way around. The *of*-construction in the inanimate condition (for example, *the old furniture of the room*) was chosen 69% of the time, and the *s*-construction (for example, *the helicopter's doors*) only 31% of the time. These results show very clear preferences of different constructions in different conditions and that animacy is an important factor for language users when they have to decide which construction to choose.

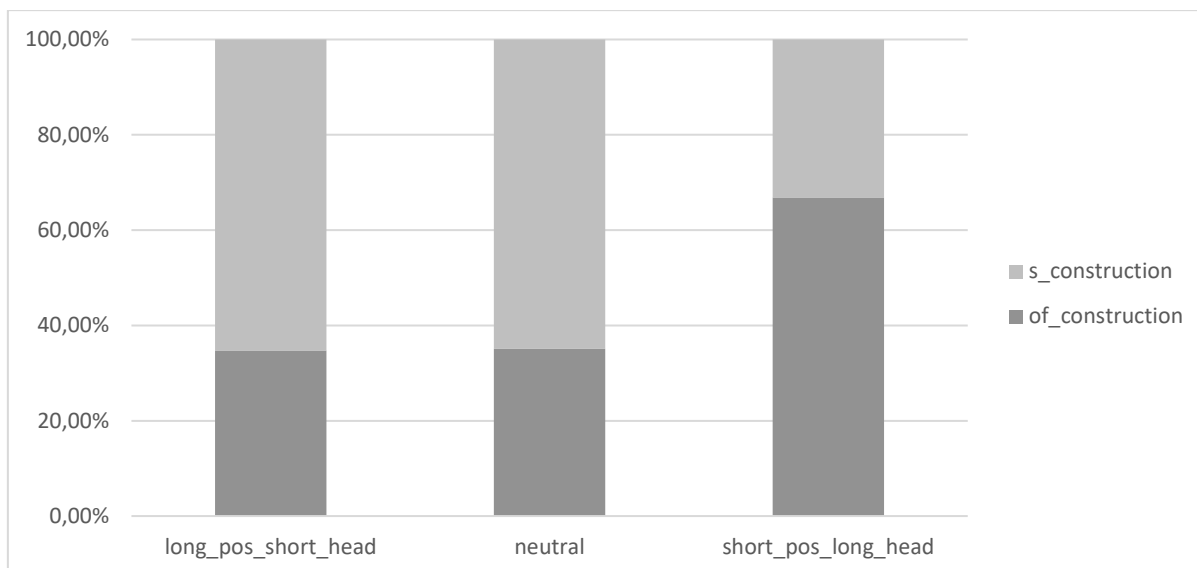


Figure 6. The use of *s*-genitive and *of*-genitive according to length

Figure 6 shows the results based on the length of the genitive constructions. There were 3 different conditions provided in the questionnaire. The first being the long possessor/short head condition (for example, *the face of the young constable/the young constable's face*), the second being the neutral condition (for example, *her husband's hair/the hair of her husband*) and the third being the short possessor/long head condition (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby/the elegant lobby of the hotel*).

The results show that the *of*-construction was chosen less in the long possessor/short head and in the neutral condition, and chosen more in the short possessor/long head condition. The *s*-construction was, correspondingly, chosen more in the long possessor/short head condition and in the neutral condition, and chosen less in the short possessor/long head condition.

The results of the long possessor/short head and the neutral condition are exactly the same – the *s*-construction was chosen 65% of the time, and the *of*-construction 35% of the time in both conditions. In the short possessor/long head condition the *s*-construction was chosen 33% and the *of*-construction 67% of the time. This result indicates that in addition to

animacy, length also affects speakers' choices between the *s*-construction and the *of*-construction.

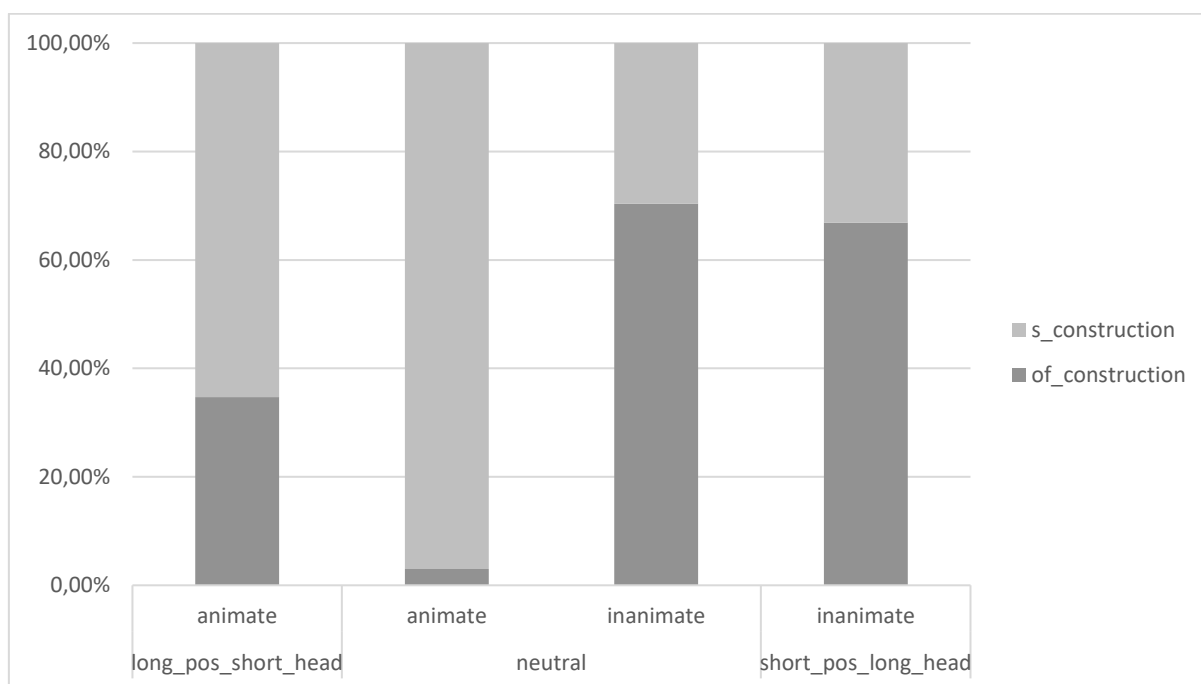


Figure 7. The use of *s*-genitive and *of*-genitive according to animacy and length

Figure 7 shows all of the conditions together and how many times the different genitive constructions were chosen in the different conditions. Similar table was also constructed in the research by Rosenbach (2005: 620), which makes the comparison provided in the discussion section, easier.

Figure 7 shows the frequency of the two genitives both in the animate and in the inanimate condition. It also shows the length of the phrases used. It should be noted that long possessor/short head condition was only provided in the animate condition and short possessor/long head condition was used only in the inanimate condition, the neutral condition was used both in the animate and inanimate condition.

As Figure 7 shows, the *s*-construction was chosen more often than the *of*-construction in both of the animate conditions (neutral and long possessor/short head). To be more

precise, the animate neutral *of*-genitive condition (for example, *the hand of the Sergeant*) was chosen only 16 times (3%), while the animate neutral *s*-genitive condition (for example, *his sister's* shoulder) was chosen 512 times (97%). The animate long/short *of*-genitive condition (for example, *the face of the young constable*) was chosen 167 times (35%) and the animate long/short *s*-genitive condition (for example, *the dark man's hand*) was chosen 314 times (65%).

Compared to the choices made in the animate condition, the results of the inanimate condition show the opposite results. In the animate condition, the *s*-construction was chosen over the *of*-construction, but in the inanimate condition, the choice of *of*-construction is more frequent. It is also worth noting that the *of*-construction and the *s*-construction are chosen equal amount of times both in the inanimate neutral and inanimate short/long conditions.

The inanimate neutral *of*-genitive condition (for example, *the head of the casket*) was chosen 337 times (70%) and the inanimate neutral *s*-genitive condition (for example, *the table's drawer*) was chosen 142 times (30%). The inanimate short/long *of*-genitive condition (for example, *the wooden headboard of the bed*) was chosen 321 times (67%) and the inanimate short/long *s*-genitive (for example, *the hotel's elegant lobby*) was chosen 159 times (33%).

7. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results of the study confirm that the first prediction was verified for non-native speakers as well, as the *s*-genitive was significantly more frequently chosen in the animate neutral condition than in the inanimate neutral condition. *S*-genitive was also used less in the animate long/short condition than in the animate neutral condition. This shows that animacy and weight are independent factors, a result that was also found in Rosenbach's (2005) study. The answer to the second question concerning the relative importance of animacy vs. weight,

based on the choices provided in the questionnaire by advanced Estonian learners of English, would be that animacy is a stronger factor than weight, because more *s*-genitives were chosen in the animate long/short condition than in the inanimate short/long condition. The third prediction was not confirmed, since there are no significant differences between English and Estonian speakers.

The results of the experiment carried out for this thesis confirm the results presented in Rosenbach's study with native speakers of American English (2005: 620). For a direct comparison, the results from Rosenbach's study are reproduced here in Figure 8. When we compare Figure 7 and Figure 8 we can see that the frequency distributions are very similar for native speakers (Figure 8) and for Estonian advanced learners of English (Figure 7) concerning the choices made in the two questionnaires.

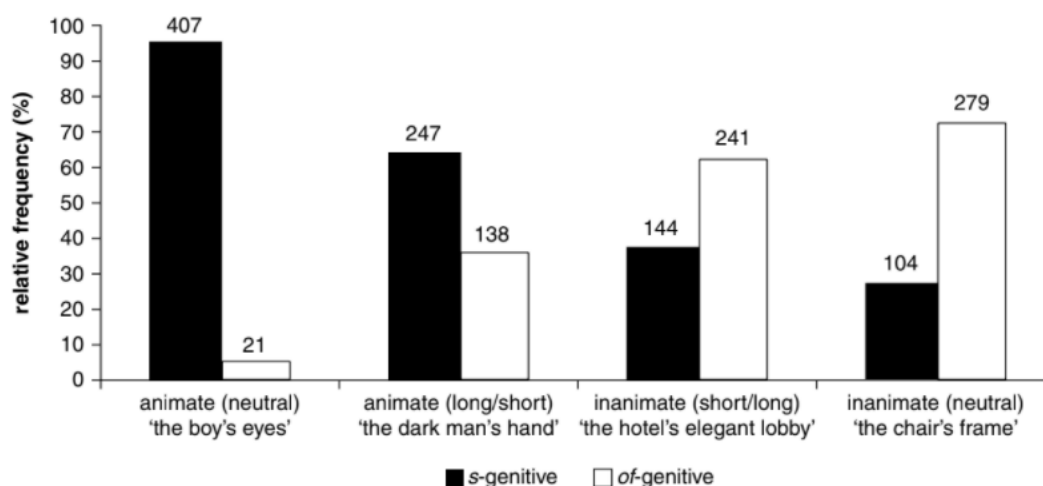


Figure 8. Rosenbach's results (Rosenbach 2005: 620)

The result of the two studies show that there is a definite pattern in what choices are made. Although there is no right or wrong answers, it can clearly be seen that one choice is preferred much more over the other one and that the choices vary as we move from one condition to the other. Hence, both studies show that animacy and length are important factors that influence the choice between the two possessive constructions.

The results also show that animacy and weight are independent factors. More specifically, the results show what Rosenbach (2005) already stated in her research, namely that there are animacy effects that cannot be attributed to an effect of weight (2005: 621). Rosenbach also stated that animacy is a more important factor than weight, at least according to these sentences which were chosen for her research. The difference between this research and Rosenbach research is that Rosenbach's respondents' were native speakers but in this case the respondents speak English as a foreign language. The current research shows that it does not matter whether the respondents are native speakers or whether they are advanced learners of English, the same choices of genitive variation are made in both cases, at least for the conditions included in the questionnaire.

However, this research has some shortcomings. For example, it can not be clearly stated that Estonian learners of English do not overuse the *s*-genitive, since the questionnaire used four different cases where genitives had to be chosen. It would be interesting to see what are the choices made by Estonian learners of English if a different experiment would be done, where other cases are included where the *s*-genitive would not usually be the preferred choice.. In addition, since all the respondents were university students of English philology, they might already make similar decisions to native speakers, since their level of English is, overall, fairly good and they have been taught the relevant grammar rules. It would be beneficial to study, in the future, non-native speakers who do not have as strong a linguistic base and whether they make the same choices. Additionally, what is lacking at the moment is a good corpus-based study similar to the study conducted by Gries and Wulff (2013) that would look at how Estonian advanced learners of English use the genitive constructions in their own writing or speaking and whether any differences can be noted there. This remains an undertaking for future research.

CONCLUSION

The current thesis provided an overview of the genitive variation and how the choices between the *s*-genitive and the *of*-genitive are made among the native and non-native speakers of English. Since there are not many studies done among the non-native speakers, the questionnaire in this thesis was conducted among Estonian learners of English and the results were compared to an earlier research by Anette Rosenbach (2005), who conducted the same questionnaire among the native speakers of English. The results of the study carried out for this thesis show that there are no significant differences between the native and non-native speakers. Both of the groups made similar choices in almost the same number of times. This proves that factors such as animacy and weight play a big role in deciding which genitive alternation to use irrespective of the variety of English used.

The first part of the study gave an overview of some of the previous studies carried out about the genitive alternation in English. From previous work, it can be seen that the following factors influence which of the two constructions is preferred: animacy, syntactic weight, specificity, internal factors (linguistic factors), external factors (written vs spoken language, regional differences, text type). The previous studies also showed that two of the main factors, animacy and weight, are independent from one another.

The second part of the study presented the experimental design used for the forced choice questionnaire and reported the main findings. The questionnaire was carried out among 47 respondents who were all students of English language and literature. The main results showed that there is no significant difference with native speakers and that the *s*-genitive is used more than the *of*-genitive, as was expected.

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APPENDIX 1

NEUTRAL	LONG POSSESSOR/ SHORT HEAD	SHORT POSSESSOR/ LONG HEAD	NEUTRAL
the boy's eyes/the eyes of the boy	the dark man's hand/ the hand of the dark man	the hotel's elegant lobby/the elegant lobby of the hotel	the chair's frame/the frame of the chair
his sister's shoulder/ the shoulder of his sister	the young constable's face/the face of the young constable	the cottage's first floor/the first floor of the cottage	the chair's stuffing/ the stuffing of the chair
the girl's cheeks/the cheeks of the girl	the small girl's eyes/ the eyes of the small girl	the chair's right side/ the right side of the chair	the casket's head/the head of the casket
her husband's hair/ the hair of her husband	his young mother's stomach/the stomach of his young mother	the clipper's proud masts/the masts of the proud clipper	the casket's lid/the lid of the casket
the masseur's hands/ the hands of the masseur	the old deacon's neck/the neck of the old deacon	the car's rusting bonnet/the rusting bonnet of the car	the bottle's base/the base of the bottle
the boy's mother/the mother of the boy	her young mother's face/the face of her young mother	the bed's wooden headboard/the wooden headboard of the bed	the table's drawer/the drawer of the table
the boy's brother/the brother of the boy	the laughing baby's mouth/the mouth of the laughing baby	the room's old furniture/the old furniture of the room	the rucksack's flap/ the flap of the rucksack
the sergeant's hand/ the hand of the sergeant	this little girl's face	his t-shirt's dirty hem/the dirty hem of his t-shirt	the building's door/ the door of the building
the boy's face/the face of the boy	the young woman's arm/the arm of the young woman	the porch's gabled roof/the gabled roof of the porch	the helicopter's doors/the doors of the helicopter
his brother's lip/the lip of his brother	his beautiful wife's eyes/the eyes of his beautiful wife	the tree's furrowed bark/the furrowed bark of the tree	her pullover's armpits/the armpits of her pullover
the man's hand/the hand of the man			

Items used in Rosenbach's experimental study (Rosenbach 2005: 640).

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Helina Tera

THE GENITIVE ALTERNATION IN ESTONIAN LEARNER ENGLISH A FORCED CHOICE TASK

GENITIIVI VAHELDUMINE EESTI KEELT EMAKEELENA KÕNELEVATE INGLISE KEELE ÕPPIJATE SEAS: SUNNITUD VALIKU KATSE

Bakalaureusetöö

2018

Lehekülgede arv: 34

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Töö eesmärk on uurida, kuidas kasutavad eestlastest inglise keele õppijad inglise keele genitiivi vorme ning kas võrreldes inglise keelt emakeelena kõnelevate inimestega on eestlaste inglise keele genitiivi vormide kasutus erinev või sarnane. Töö alguses on sissejuhatus, millele järgneb teooria inglise keele genitiivi vormide kohta (mis see on ja mis faktorid seda mõjutavad). Keskendutakse kahele peamisele faktorile – elususele ja pikkusele. Sellele järgneb kirjeldus Anette Rosenbachi (2005) sunnitud valiku katsest, mis viidi läbi inglise keelt emakeelena kõnelevate inimeste seas. Töö empiiriline osa kirjeldab käesoleva töö raames läbi viidud katset inglise keele õppijatega, mis põhineb samadel küsimustel, mis Rosenbachi katse. Seejärel on esitatud katsetulemused, mis näitavad, et eesti keelt emakeelena kõnelevate inglise keele õppijate ja inglise keelt emakeelena kõnelevate genitiivi valikud on sarnased. Töö lõpeb kokkuvõttega.

Märksõnad: inglise keel, inglise keele õppijad, genitiivi vaheldumine, sunnitud valiku katse

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