

## An L3 perspective on possessives: Acquisition of structural ambiguity in Russian

The present paper aims at addressing theoretical and methodological challenges in  $L_n$  acquisition based on the pilot data from the acquisition of the reflexive/non-reflexive distinction by L1 Swedish/L2 English/L3 Russian speakers. Pronominal possessives and the reflexive/non-reflexive distinction in particular, present new potential for investigating cross-linguistic effects in multilingual acquisition, since even typologically related languages exhibit differences in their systems (e.g. English vs. Swedish), while languages from different language families may exhibit similarities (e.g. English and Russian or Swedish and Russian). All three focus languages use irreflexive possessive pronouns *she* and *he* in third person singular. Yet, it is Russian and English that are similar in that both allow *she* (as well as *he*) to refer to the subject clause/possessor, such as Maria in (1a & b). In contrast, irreflexive possessives, like *hennes* 'her' in (1c), cannot be bound by the subject clause/possessor in Swedish. At the same time, Russian and Swedish are similar in that both have reflexive possessives, while English does not, illustrated in (2). These structural similarities and differences can result in intricate cross-linguistic patterns in L1 Swedish/L2 English/L3 Russian speakers. Additionally, challenges for these learners can be associated with the fact that the reflexive/non-reflexive distinction is structurally ambiguous in L3 Russian, since both reflexive and non-reflexive possessives can refer to the possessor, yet, these learners' prior language experience with the reflexive/non-reflexive distinction lacks ambiguity, since the reflexive and non-reflexive possessives are in complementary distribution in languages like Swedish.

- (1) a. Maria<sub>i</sub> kupila dom.      Ona lyubit **ee<sub>i</sub> dom.**      RUS = ENG ≠ SWE  
b. Maria<sub>i</sub> bought a house. She loves **her<sub>i</sub> house.**  
c. Maria<sub>i</sub> köpte ett hus.    \*Hon älskar **hennes<sub>i</sub> hus.**  
    'Maria bought a house. She loves **her own house.**'
- (2) a. Maria<sub>i</sub> kupila dom.      Ona lyubit **svoj<sub>i</sub> dom.**      RUS = SWE ≠ ENG  
b. Maria<sub>i</sub> köpte ett hus.      Hon älskar **sitt<sub>i</sub> hus.**  
c. Maria<sub>i</sub> bought a house. \*She loves **REFL<sub>i</sub> house.**  
    'Maria bought a house. She loves **her own house.**'

In the pilot study, we used the traditional acceptability judgement test (five-point Likert scale) where two experimental conditions tested the structures in (1a) and (2a). The test also included six other conditions testing pronominal distinctions in first person singular, verb placement in declarative clauses with adverbs as well as ungrammatical fillers (Table 1). Our participants were nine Swedish second and third semester students of Russian (mean age 24, all with high proficiency in English) and nine L1 Russian speakers. L1 Russian clearly distinguished between the two structures giving preference to the reflexive possessives: the mean acceptance rate for reflexive pronouns (*svoj* & *svoju*) was 4,5 and it was 2,5 for irreflexive (*ego* 'his' & *ee* 'her'). No clear preference was found in L1 Swedish learners whose acceptance rate was high in both cases: 4,7 with reflexive possessives and 3,9 with irreflexive. The ungrammatical fillers were judged as unacceptable (mean acceptance rate=1,4). Our results are in contrast to the results reported in Fyhn (2017) obtained using a forced choice technique with L1 Russian speakers (n=60) and L1 Norwegian/L3 Russian learners (n=12). When asked to choose a reflexive (*svoj* & *svoju*), irreflexive (*ego* 'his' & *ee* 'her') or null, L1 Russian gave preference to the reflexives, choosing them 60% of the time, but L1 Norwegian used reflexives only 20% of the time, giving preference to irreflexive pronouns (75% of the time). Interestingly, L1 Russian never chose irreflexive pronouns, but allowed null elements 40% of the time. These results urge further investigation and discussion of methodological avenues for the study of structural ambiguity in  $L_n$  acquisition, which we will address in the presentation based on a larger data sample. (517)

Table 1. The study design.

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Russian example</b>	<b>English translation</b>	<b>No. of items</b>
Refl-3	Мария купила дом. Она любит свой дом.	Maria bought a house. She loves her own house.	8
Prn-3	Мария купила дом. Она любит ее дом.	Maria bought a house. She loves her own house.	8
Refl-1	Я ищу свой паспорт.	I am looking for REFL passport	8
Prn-1	Я ищу мой паспорт.	I am looking for my passport.	8
S-Adv-V	Анна любит природу. Она часто гуляет.	Anna likes nature. She often walks.	8
S-V-Adv	Анна любит природу. Она гуляет часто.	Anna likes nature. She often walks.	8
XP-S-V	Анна любит природу. В понедельник она гуляет.	Anna likes nature. On Monday she walks.	8
XP-V-S	Анна любит природу. В понедельник гуляет она.	Anna likes nature. On Monday she walks.	8
Fillers	Летела по самолет небу большая.		16