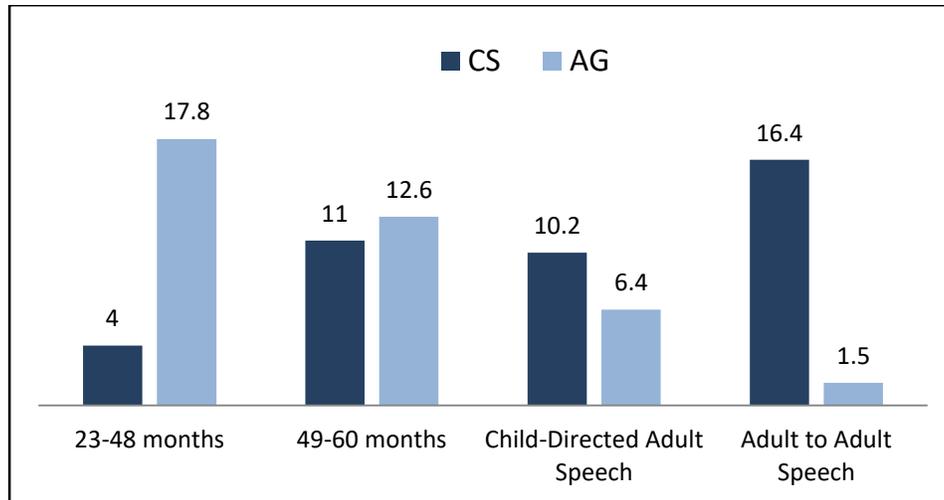**A Corpus Study of the Distribution of Possessives in Child and Adult Emirati Arabic**

I present a corpus study of child Emirati Arabic (EA) possessives supporting recent work which shows that frequency-based accounts do not seem to make the right predictions on order of acquisition (e.g. Anderssen & Westergaard, 2010). More particularly, I show that the development of construct state possessives in EA goes through stages of maturation before reaching target-like levels of frequency. Possession in EA can be expressed with pronominal suffixes (1); a construct state (CS) (2) or in an analytic genitive form (AG) with the use of the particle *maal* (3) (Harning 1980, Holes 1990):

1. ʔxo -j   ʃu   nɛ -saw -i   ʃɛɣɛl -na   haða
   brother -1SG   what   pl- do -2SG   job -1PL   this
   "What can we do my brother, this is our job."
2. marwan   j- ʃtɛɣɛl   fɛ məktabat   ɛl- ɣamʕah   ʕalaʃan   j- qɛdar   j- ʕəjjɛʃ ʕɛmrah
   Marwan   3SG- work   in   library   the- university because 3SG- able 3SG-live himself
   "Marwan works at the university's library to be able to live."
3. sɛqatˤt   fɛ   ɛl-ʔɛmtħan   maal   ɛl-ʔɛnglizi
   failed -3SG   in   the- test   POSS   the- English
   "She failed in the English test."

CSs are assumed to be derived by a complex process, involving head movement of the possessed noun (Fassi Fehri 1993); phrasal movement of the possessee (Shlonsky 2004) or a post-syntactic operation (Benmamoun 2000). This derivational complexity explains a number of CS properties, including the unavailability of CS-initial determiners and strong adjacency effects between possessor-possessee. Based on an adult EA corpus, I confirm previous work (Harning, 1980), which takes the CS to be the default choice for possession in EA. The CS is used in 16.4% of the total number of possessive structures, while the AG is used in only 1.5%. These facts lead to two opposite predictions for maturational and frequency-based systems: a maturational approach predicts that the CS will emerge later because of its structural complexity. In contrast, a frequency-based account predicts that the CS will be acquired earlier, due to its higher frequency in the input. I tested these two predictions, based on a longitudinal corpus of four Emirati children, collected over a period of two years (age range 1;11-5;00). An examination of child-directed speech, shows that adults use less CS and more AG structures compared to adult-to-adult interactions, indicating sensitivity to the complexity of the CS. However, the child data does not match the frequency counts of child-directed adult speech. Children at the early stages of acquisition (24-48 months) produce predominately AG structures. In later stages (49-60 months) the percentage of CS structures increases to levels of child-directed adult speech while the frequency of AG decreases (see diagram 1). A linear regression analysis between age and number of CSs results in beta 0.553, n=29. The ANOVA test shows a very high correlation of $p<0.002$ between the two variables. The results seem to confirm the assumption that CS is a morphosyntactically complex and marked structure. In addition, they challenge frequency-based accounts of language acquisition and support a maturational process in the development of possessive structures in EA.

CS   AG

23-48 months: CS 4, AG 17.8
49-60 months: CS 11, AG 12.6
Child-Directed Adult Speech: CS 10.2, AG 6.4
Adult to Adult Speech: CS 16.4, AG 1.5

1. Patterns of possessive structure usage in EA Adult and Child Speech

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