

English genitive variation					
s-genitive			of-genitive		
possessor	POSS 's	possessum (head)	possessum (head)	of	possessor
<i>the king</i>	<i>'s</i>	<i>palace</i>	<i>the palace</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>the king</i>

• Empirical evidence for ganging-up cumulativity

- Preference for the s-genitive if
 - the possessor is [+animate]
 - the possessor is [+topical]
 - the possessive relation is a prototypical one (kin relations, body parts, ownership): [+ prototypical] possessive relation

- Relative strength of animacy, topicality, and possessive relation was tested in an experimental study (> questionnaire study)

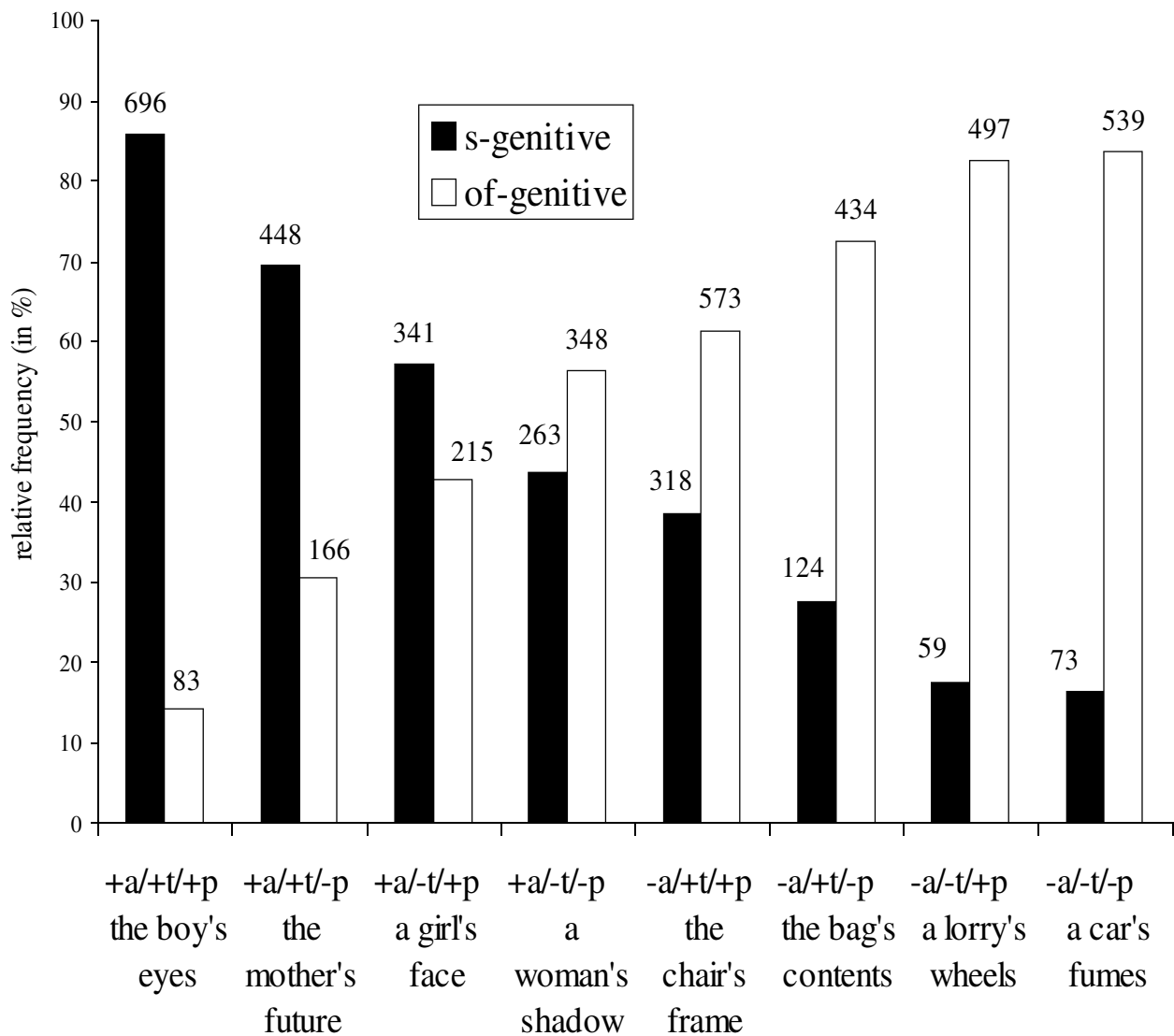
Table 1: Experimental study (animacy, topicality, possessive relation): conditions and items (at least 10 items per condition)

[+animate]				[-animate]			
[+topical]		[-topical]		[+topical]		[-topical]	
[+proto]*	[-proto]	[+proto]	[-proto]	[+proto]	[-proto]	[+proto]	[- proto]
<i>the boy's eyes/ the eyes of the boy</i>	<i>the mother's future/ the future of the mother</i>	<i>a girl's face/ the face of a girl</i>	<i>a woman's shadow/ the shadow of a woman</i>	<i>the chair's frame/ the frame of the chair</i>	<i>the bag's contents/ the contents of the bag</i>	<i>a lorry's wheels/ the wheels of a lorry</i>	<i>a car's fumes/ the fumes of a car</i>

Example from questionnaire:

A helicopter waited on the nearby grass like a sleeping insect, its pilot standing outside with Marino. Whit, a perfect specimen of male fitness in a black flight suit, opened [*the helicopter's doors/the doors of the helicopter*] to help us board. (adapted from: Patricia Cornwell [1994]. *The Body Farm*, p. 52)

**animacy, topicality, possessive relation -
experimental study (British subjects, n=56)**



Results from experimental study:

- factor hierarchy for the choice of the s-genitive:
animacy > topicality > possessive relation
- Animacy is, however, not *per se* the strongest factor but topicality and possessive relation can both together 'knock-out' animacy: If the possessor is [- topical] and if the possessive relation is [- prototypical], the of-genitive becomes the preferred choice (*the shadow of a woman* > *a woman's shadow*)

• Empirical evidence for counting cumulativity

Preference for the *s*-genitive if

- possessor is animate.
- possessor is short.

- Relative strength of animacy and weight was tested in an experimental study (cf. Rosenbach 2003)

Table 2: Experimental study: animacy vs. weight – conditions and items (at least 10 items per condition)

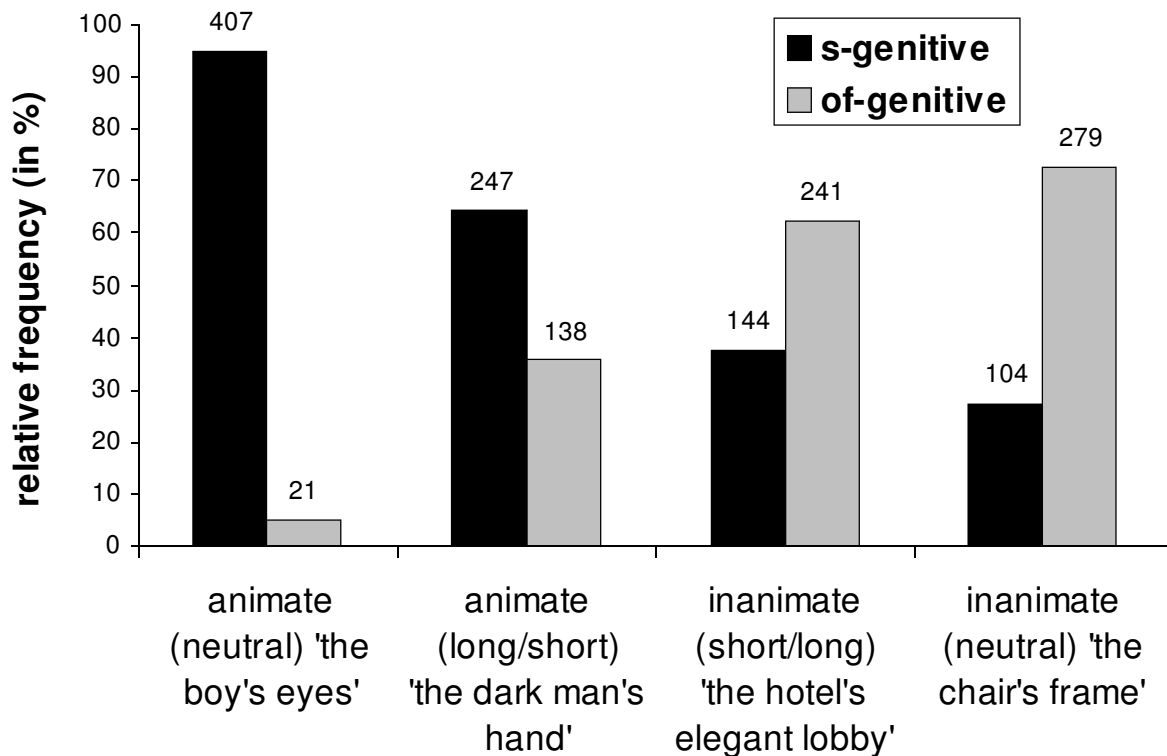
animate		inanimate	
neutral	long possessor/short head	short possessor /long head	neutral
<i>the boy's eyes/ the eyes of the boy</i>	<i>the dark man's hand/ the hand of the dark man</i>	<i>the hotel's elegant lobby/ the elegant lobby of the hotel</i>	<i>the chair's frame/ the frame of the chair</i>

Predictions for relative strength of animacy and weight:

- **weight > animacy:**
 ☐relative frequency of *s*-genitive:
 inanimate short/long condition > animate long/short condition
 (*the hotel's elegant lobby*) > (*the dark man's hand*)

- **animacy > weight:**
 ☐relative frequency of *s*-genitive:
 animate long/short condition > inanimate short/long condition
 (*the dark man's hand*) > (*the hotel's elegant lobby*)

experimental study: animacy vs. weight



Results:

- **animacy > weight:**

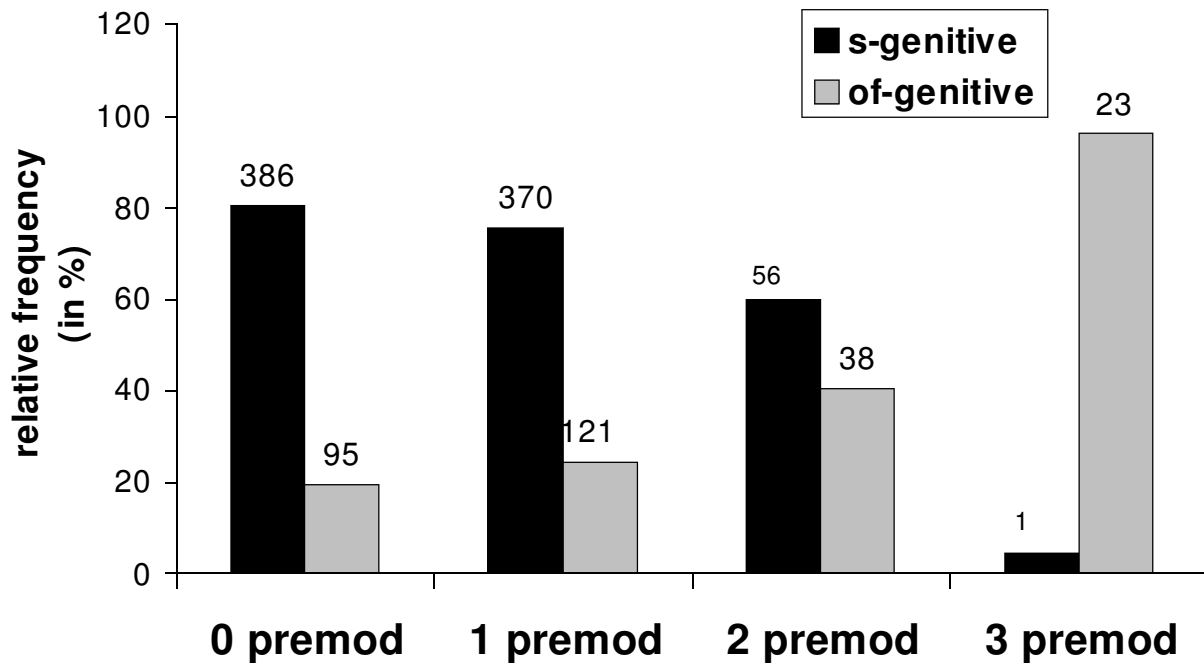
- s-genitive more frequent in long/short animate condition than in short/long inanimate condition, $z, p < 0.001$

the dark man's hand > the hotel's elegant lobby

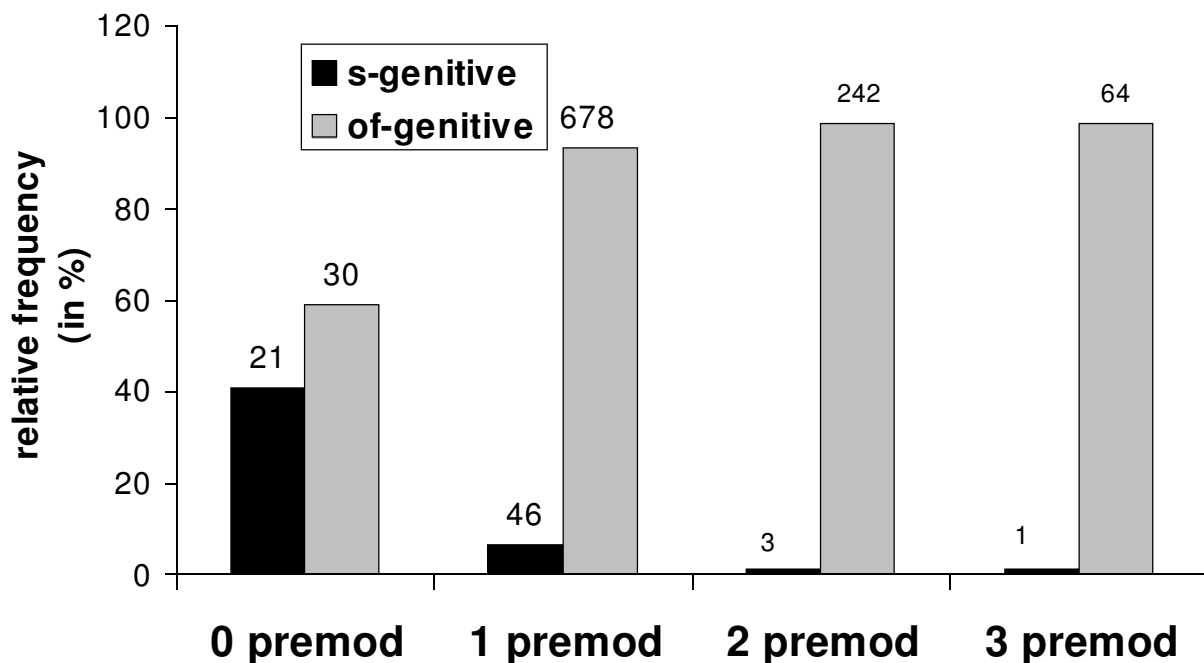
- s-genitive more frequent than of-genitive with animate possessors, even if possessor is long, $\chi^2, p < 0.001$

- **Open question:** What about heavier premodification...? – Is animacy *per se* the stronger factor no matter how long the possessor is?

**weight and animacy of possessor in ICE-GB:
human possessors**



**weight and animacy of possessor in ICE-GB:
inanimate possessors**



Result:

animacy > weight: possessor ≤ 3 words (2 premod.)

- weight > animacy: possessor ≥ 4 words (3 premod.)

References:

Rosenbach, Anette (2002). *Genitive Variation in English. Conceptual factors in synchronic and diachronic studies*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Rosenbach, Anette (2003). "Comparing animacy vs. weight as determinants of grammatical variation in English". Submitted Ms.