

# **Social Interaction, Social Context, and Language**

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*Essays in Honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp*

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# 11 USE AND ACQUISITION OF GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN SAMOAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The analysis presented here considers ways in which adult and child speakers of Samoan use genitive constructions in their social interactions to encode a variety of semantic roles. We will consider in particular displayed preferences for encoding would-be agents as genitive constituents. In other research, we have noted that while Samoan speakers can express agency through ergative-marked noun phrases, these constructions are used infrequently in spoken discourse (Duranti, 1981, 1994; Duranti & Ochs, 1990; Ochs, 1982, 1988). Generally, ergative constructions are used to mark responsibility, either to praise or to blame (Duranti, 1990). In the present discussion, we indicate how genitive constructions are useful alternatives to either expressing agency explicitly (through ergative casemarked NPs) or not at all (leaving the interlocutor to infer the agent from background knowledge or other means.)

How perceived scenes and perspectives are mapped onto grammar has been a central concern within psycholinguistics. Developmental psycholinguists have been particularly interested in children's understanding and linguistic articulation of transitive scenes — what Slobin (1985) calls “manipulative activity scenes” — in which an agent performing some action affects some object. The concern of the present study is to extend our understanding of manipulative activity scenes and grammar beyond the articulation of major sentential constituents, more specifically to attend to ways in which children and

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<sup>1</sup> In 1972, one of the authors, Elinor Ochs, then a graduate student writing a dissertation on Malagasy oratory and a mother of 2-year-old twins, wrote to Professor Susan Ervin-Tripp about the enterprise of documenting the conversational competence of very young children. Ervin-Tripp had participated in crafting an interdisciplinary framework to interface anthropology and developmental psychology and pioneered research on the developing sociolinguistic skills of children in the first few years of their lives. Fortunately for Ochs, Ervin-Tripp wrote back, providing the initial scaffolding of what has become a lifetime professional focus on ways in which the language of children and other novices is constitutive of their membership in particular communities.

adults grammaticalize manipulative activity scenes and perspectives within genitive constructions. Genitives have been primarily associated with the encoding of locative relationships such as possessor or goal (Clark, 1978; Lyons, 1967, 1977). In languages such as Samoan, however, the genitive construction encodes a wide range of semantic roles including human agents and actors. The fact that genitives, often called "possessives," do not simply or exclusively express relations of ownership has been noted by a number of scholars working on a variety of languages (see Clark, 1978; Lyons, 1967, 1977; Parisi & Castelfranchi, 1974; Bugenhagen, 1986).<sup>2</sup> Further, the link between genitives and agency has been reported in the acquisition literature (Budwig, 1985) and in typological studies of ergative languages, which note that in several languages, e.g., Eskimo (Woodbury, 1977), Mayan (Craig, 1977), and Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1985), the genitive and ergative marker are the same. In Samoan the genitive marker and the ergative marker are *not* the same. Nonetheless there is a strong semantic link between the two. Our Samoan data represent what is to our knowledge both the most varied and the most recurrent use of genitive constructions for semantic roles other than possession. In this paper, we will first provide a brief description of the uses of genitive constructions by Samoan adults; then we will compare the adult data with the patterns produced by four young children. We suggest that in Samoan, a major locus of grammatical development lies not so much in the increased production of the three major sentential constituents (verb, subject, object) as in the internal complexity of the constituents themselves.

## DATA COLLECTION

The research on which this analysis is based was carried out in a traditional village in Western Samoa, on the island of Upolu, over a total period of about 16 months (for ethnographic and methodological details, see Ochs, 1988). The collection of children's speech in 1978-1979 was carried out by E. Ochs and M. Platt. The longitudinal study focused on six children from six different households, ranging from 19 to 35 months at the onset of the study (Ochs, 1985). A total of 128 hours of audio and 20 hours of video recording of these children were collected and transcribed in the field. During the same period, A. Duranti collected more than 50 hours of adult speech from a variety of speech activities, including informal conversation and formal speechmaking (Duranti, 1981). About half of this corpus was transcribed in situ. Additional field work on language acquisition and grammatical variation across contexts was conducted by A. Duranti and E. Ochs in 1981 (March-May) and in 1988 (August).

<sup>2</sup> Lyons (1977, p. 474) writes: "It can be argued that so-called possessive expressions are to be regarded as a subclass of locatives (as they very obviously are in terms of their grammatical structure, in certain languages)." This "localistic" view places the emphasis on a different dimension from what we have been noticing in our Samoan data, where location is only one of the possible semantic relations expressed by genitive constructions and not necessarily the most frequent or salient one.

## A PREFERENCE FOR TWO CONSTITUENTS

Our previous research on Samoan language acquisition indicated that preferences in the expression of major sentential constituents and in the use of ergative case marking differ little in adult and child language use. Both Samoan children and adults display a strong preference for verb-initial utterances that contain only two major constituents: a verb or verb complex (VC) and a nominal argument.<sup>3</sup>

### (1) VC + Nominal Argument

We call this preference the "Two Constituent Bias" (Duranti & Ochs, 1983, 1990; Ochs, 1988). The tendency to express two constituents is illustrated in examples (2) and (3). Example (2) is from a letter. Example (3) is an excerpt from a conversation in which two chiefs and an orator (F.) are discussing different people's ability to perform traditional speechmaking. The VC constituent and the NP (or PP) which follows are separated by brackets:<sup>4</sup>

### (2) (Ma2, letter)

50 *Malae [fai] [i le toaina]*  
Malae say to ART old man  
'Malae, tell the old man'

51 *[e malie] [lona loto]*  
TA agree his soul  
(lit. 'his soul agrees')  
'I am sorry'

<sup>3</sup> The term "verb complex," often found in grammatical studies of Bantu and other language families, has been extended to the analysis of Polynesian languages by Seiter (1982). The VC contains a number of syntactico-semantic markers in addition to the verb stem, including tense aspect markers, auxiliary verbs, adverbial particles, deictic particles, and clitic pronouns.

<sup>4</sup> Note on transcription and data sources: All the examples with a source (e.g., "Pastor & Deacon") are either taken from transcripts of audio-recorded spontaneous interaction or from personal letters written to or received from family members abroad (e.g., "Mal"). The rest of the examples have been elicited from native speakers. We have tried to use Samoan orthography as consistently as possible with two exceptions: (i) for the spoken data, we have transcribed each long vowel with two identical vowels rather than with a macron on a vowel; (ii) the written material (viz. letters) has been left in the original written version, which often leaves out glottal stops and long vowels (we should also mention that glottal stop deletion is quite common in everyday speech). The letter *g* stands for a velar nasal and the inverted apostrophe (') for a glottal stop. The large amount of "bad speech" (viz. no *ts* or *ns*) in our examples is quite characteristic of our spoken corpus and is *not* a function of formality as erroneously portrayed by Milner (1966) and Cook (1988, on this topic, see Duranti, 1981; Duranti & Ochs, 1986; Ochs, 1985, 1988).

Abbreviations: AFF = affect particle; ART = article; Cia = verbal suffix; DX = deictic particle; EMP = emphasis particle; INT = intensifier, sometimes with reflexive function; Prep = preposition; pro = clitic pronoun; PST = past; TA = tense/aspect marker.

- 52 [e le o avatua ai] [ana mea  
TA NEG TA give+DX+Cia pro his thing  
'(that) the things']
- 53 [ia sa tusi mai ai]  
that PST write DX pro  
'that he wrote to me about'
- 54 [e avatu]]  
TA give+DX  
'to send are not included'
- 55 ona [ua tuai mai] [le tusi]  
bec. TA late DX ART letter  
'because the letter was late'
- 56 ae [ua lafo atu] [le pusa]  
but TA send DX ART box  
'but the box has been sent'
- 57 ne'i te'i fo'i [ua oso] [lona ita]  
otherwise EMP TA jump his angry  
'otherwise he will get angry'

In example (2), line 50 has a VC and a PP, and the rest of the main clauses (in lines 51, 52-4, 55, and 56) are all VC+NP — with 53, a relative clause, and 54, an infinitival clause, being part of a complex NP whose head noun, *ana mea* 'his things' is in line 52. In (3) below, except for the interrogative *â?* 'what?' in 505, all lines have two constituents (see lines 500, 501, 503, 506, 509, 511).

(3) (Watch)

- 500 F; [e feololo â] [le lâuga a si koiga].  
TA not bad EMP ART speech of AFF old man  
'The poor old man's speech is not bad.'
- 501 T; laga [lelei] [Pua].  
because good Pua  
'Because Pua is good.'
- 502 (1.0)
- 503 'a [e pau â le mea] ['o le u'umi].  
but TA only EMP the thing Pred ART long  
'but the only thing is the length.'
- 504 (0.6)
- 505 F; -hh â?  
'-hh what?'
- 506 T; [pau le mea] ['o le u'umi].  
only ART thing Pred ART long  
'The only thing is the length.'
- 507 F; (CL)
- 508 (2.0)

- 509 T; 'a [e lelei kele] [Pua].  
but TA good very Pua  
'but Pua is very good.'

510 (0.5)

- 511 F; [pu'upu'u] [le lâuga a le kamaloa o Pua].  
short ART speech of ART man Pred Pua  
(lit. 'the man Pua's speech (was) short')  
'the man Pua gave a short speech.'

The analysis carried out in Ochs (1982) of the frequency of the two constituent pattern in transitive constructions in adult and children's speech indicates that 1) all three major constituents appear in less than 25% of adult transitive utterances, and 2) in children's speech, there is no developmental trend towards expression of all three constituents. Younger children encode more constituents than older children, and taping sessions across eight months display highly variable encoding patterns.

In both adult and children's speech, the NP expressed in two constituent clauses tends to be an absolutive NP, either Subjects of intransitive verbs or Objects of transitive verbs. This tendency has also been referred to as "the preferred argument structure" by Du Bois (1987). Across a large number of languages, speakers display a preference for encoding absolutive arguments over agents as major sentential constituents. This means that (1) could be more accurately represented as (4):

(4) VC + Absolutive NP

These observations led Du Bois to suggest that in all languages, speaker-hearers tend to avoid expressing agents as full lexical NPs. Speaker-hearers typically identify agents from referents expressed in prior discourse as absolutive constituents. Our examination of Samoan speech and writing, however, suggest that this presumption requires further thought. In Samoan, agent participants may be expressed through genitive constructions within the absolutive NP. If we take a strictly syntactico-semantic definition, viz. Agents to be Subjects of transitive clauses, then our data largely confirm Du Bois' findings. On the other hand, if we widen our notion of Agent to include potential or factual agents in described, evoked, or presupposed events, regardless of the grammatical role of the phrase in which they are linguistically expressed, our data show different results.

## ABSOLUTIVE AS A COMPLEX NP

In Samoan, in a significant number of cases, the "Absolutive NP" of a two constituent utterance is in fact a complex NP that includes both an Affected Object (or Undergoer) as a Head Noun and an Agent or some other semantic role(s) in the Modifier. The

Modifier is typically a genitive phrase, which is marked by the preposition *o* or *a*.<sup>5</sup> The syntax of these constructions is schematically represented in (5) (the angled brackets indicate an "either or" condition in the case of coreferentiality of Pro and NP):

(5) Verb Complex + [Art <Gen Pro> Head Noun <Gen NP> ]

While genitive constructions in Samoan often express a relation of "possession," they express a wide range of other participant roles as well. Thus, in (6), the genitive phrase *a Eki* 'Eki's' refers to the person who prepared the food. Given that Eki is the young untitled male of the family, it would be inappropriate, in a Samoan cultural context, to define the food he cooked for others as "belonging" to him. We consider this an example of genitive construction used to express an Agent participant:

AGENT:

(6) (Pastor & Deacon)

D; *fai le umu kalo a Eki ma lu'au*  
do ART oven taro of Eki and palusami  
(lit. 'make Eki's oven taro and palusami')  
'Eki made baked taro and palusami'  
*e fa'akali mai ai.*  
TA wait DX pro  
'to welcome (them) with it.'

The widespread use of the genitive construction to express Agent roles that would be expressed as Subjects in nominative-accusative languages, is further illustrated by examples (7) and (8). In (7), for instance, the full NP which one would typically expect to be in the "controller" position for reflexivization (*le kagaka* 'the person') appears instead as part of the Absolutive NP, with the accompanying intensifier *ia* giving the reflexive interpretation:

(7) (Pesio 2;3)

I; *e usu a le pese a le kagaka ia.*  
TA sing EMP ART song of ART person INT  
(lit. 'do sing the very person's song')  
'A person should sing his own song.'

In (8) the NP expressing the Agent of the verb *aumai* 'bring, give' is again part of the genitive modifier within the Absolutive NP:

(8) (Watch)

F; *'e aumai le maga'o o le kagaka.*  
TA give+DX ART want of ART person  
(lit. 'give (us) the person's wish')

<sup>5</sup> The use of one marker over the other is determined by a number of semantic, pragmatic, and idiosyncratic factors pertaining to the relation between the referent of the genitive phrase and the referent of the head noun. The distinction between *a* and *o* in Polynesian languages is generally characterized as that between alienable/inalienable, controlled/noncontrolled, or dominant/subordinate possession (cf. Biggs, 1969; Chapin, 1978; Chung, 1973; Comrie & Thompson, 1985; Wilson, 1976).

'each person gave (us) his request.'

Furthermore, when a relative clause is a transitive clause, the Agent participant often appears as the genitive modifier of the head noun rather than as an overt Agent NP within the relative clause. An example is provided in lines 52-53 in (2) above.

Examples (9) through (12) show other kinds of semantic roles expressed through genitive phrases:

GOAL:

(9) (Watch)

A; *fai mai avaku le fagu susu a le kama.*  
say DX give+DX ART bottle milk of ART boy  
'said "give the milk bottle to the boy"')

BENEFACTIVE/GOAL:

(10) (Watch)

P; *e lee faia gi a lâkou kupe a lafoga.*  
TA NOT do+Cia any of them money of offer  
(lit. 'not made their money of offer')  
'(we) didn't give them any money for the fund-raising'

ACTOR:

(11) (Pesio 2;3)

I; *vala'au Kaepii lale sau*  
call Taepii there come  
'call out for Taepii over there to come'  
*fai le kou sa'asa'a.*  
do ART your dance  
'(so that) you (pl.) do a sa'asa'a (dance)'

LOCATIVE:

(12) (Pesio 2;10)

I; *kâ ô le pasi [o] Falevao.*<sup>6</sup>  
we-DU goPl ART bus of Falevao  
'we'll go with Falevao village bus.'

Table 11.1 shows the distribution of different semantic roles in genitive phrases in adult speech. As shown in Table 11.1, along with Possessor and Social Relationship, Agent is one of the most common types of semantic roles expressed through genitive phrases. This finding opens up a whole series of questions about the definition and distribution of not only Agents but Actors, Experiencers, and other semantic roles in a language like Samoan. Rather than the putatively "natural" or "universal" tendency for human participants to appear as Subjects, a tendency codified as "subjectivization" in Case Grammar (Fillmore, 1968, 1977; see also Kuno, 1973) and "genitive ascension" in Relational Grammar (Kimenyi, 1980), Samoan seems to favor "genitivization," that is, the embedding of a potentially major participant NP role within another NP, typically the NP

<sup>6</sup> In this example, the genitive marker *o* is absent, but it would be present in a careful speech version of the same utterance.

that contains the Affected Object, as a genitive modifier. This would be a kind of "detransitivization" (Mosel, 1985; Ochs, 1982).

TABLE 11.1. Semantic Roles in Genitive Constructions\* (Adult)

Context:	Semantic Roles** Encoded:								
	POSS	BEN	GL/LC	AG	ACT	EXP	PART	PNT	REL
Informal Women's Speech	.19 (27)	.14 (20)	.06 (9)	.16 (22)	.16 (23)	.06 (8)	.04 (6)	.01 (2)	.16 (22)
Informal Men's Speech	.21 (7)	.12 (10)	.16 (13)	.19 (16)	.08 (7)	.06 (5)	.10 (8)	-- (0)	.23 (19)
Total	.20 (44)	.13 (30)	.10 (22)	.17 (38)	.13 (30)	.06 (13)	.06 (14)	.01 (2)	.23 (51)

\* Each genitive construction may encode more than one semantic role. Percentages were calculated with respect to total number of semantic roles encoded in the corpus of genitive NPs.

\*\* POSS = possessor, BEN = benefactive, GL/LC = goal/locative, AG = agent, ACT = actor, EXP = experiencer, PART = body part or other part/whole relation, PNT = patient, REL = social relationship.

However, this transformational view is misleading for a number of reasons. It implies that complex NPs containing genitive Agents can always be paraphrased as canonical transitive clauses. In many cases, however, there are more or less subtle semantico-pragmatic differences between the version with the genitive Agent and the one with the agent expressed as an NP marked by the ergative particle. The use of an Absolutive NP with a genitive Agent focuses on the Object or result of an action and may imply the Agent to be not necessarily responsible for the creation or pursuit of the Object, whereas the ergative NP with a canonical verb highlights the human participant (Agent) as a willful and responsible actor whose actions may directly affect an object. This is illustrated in (13a-b):

(13a) (Pastor & Deacon)

D; *koiki maua le mākou fā kâlâ*  
almost got ART our four dollar  
(lit. 'almost got our four dollars')  
'we almost got four dollars'

(13b)

*koiki maua le fā kâlâ e mākou*  
almost got ART four dollar ERG we  
'we almost got the four dollars (we were actively looking for, as if they had been hidden from us)'

These two examples also show that the change from genitive to ergative involves not only a difference in the way in which the human participant's role is presented, but also a change in the identifiability of the Patient: the Object is more identifiable in (13b) — with the ergative NP — than in (13a) — with the genitive phrase (Timberlake, 1975); this property of utterances with ergative agents matches Hopper and Thompson's (1980) characterization of transitivity.

Furthermore, the genitive phrase may encode more than one role for the same human participant, (viz. Agent and Benefactive), whereas the ergative NP encodes only one role (viz. Agent). Example (14a), for instance, implies that the Youth Association (*autalavou*) is involved in the practice and is also the beneficiary of the event (viz., thanks to the money that will be raised during the feast). (14b) instead implies that the Youth Association does the practice and the practice only:

(14a) (letter "Ma'l")

41 *e fai fa'afiafiaga a le autalavou a K. ma L.*  
TA do rehearsal of ART youth assoc. of K. and L.  
'K.'s and L.'s youth association has been doing the rehearsal'  
(lit. 'do rehearsal of the Youth Association of K. and L.')

42 *e sue ai tupe*  
TA search pro money  
'to raise money (with it)'

43 *e fai ai le latou falesa fou.*  
TA do pro ART their church new  
'to make (with it) their new church.'

(14b)

*e fai fa'afiafiaga e le autalavou a K. ma L.*  
TA do rehearsal ERG ART youth assoc. of K. and L.  
'K.'s and L.'s youth association has been doing the rehearsal'

In general, an ergative NP implies that the Agent participant is involved in the action described by the verb in a more restricted sense than is implied by the genitive NP.

In contrast to languages like English, where Subjects of transitive verbs can express a wide range of semantic roles (Keenan, 1984), in Samoan, ergative NPs cover a restricted set of roles, viz., typically human initiators of actions (Cook, 1988). Furthermore, from the point of view of language use, the use of ergative NPs seems associated in Samoan discourse with a stance that assumes or assigns accountability to the participant role (Duranti, 1990; Ochs, 1982). When the genitive phrase, as opposed to the ergative phrase, is used to refer to the putative agent, the description of the event seems to focus on the *product* or *result of the action* of the verb (if the verb is a potentially transitive verb) rather than on the party who is responsible for the process. For this reason, genitive phrases seem to cover cases that in other languages might be expressed by passives or stative-like clauses where the Patient or underlying Object acquires the syntactic role of Subject.

## THE ACQUISITION OF GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Investigation of the internal structure of the frequently used Absolutive NP opens up a series of new questions concerning acquisition: Is complexity of the Absolutive NP something that unifies both adult and child language? Or is it here that adults' and children's speech differs? Can we hence say that the locus of grammatical development in Samoan may lie primarily **within the NP** rather than in clause structure? From our preliminary investigation, we are leaning toward a positive answer to these questions. In contrast to acquisition of clause structure, the acquisition of genitive construction shows a clear progression towards a broader range of semantic roles encoded and more complex head nouns.

### Semantic Roles

Let us consider first the distribution of semantic roles, especially agent roles, in children's genitive constructions. Table 11.2 indicates the acquisition patterns of four children: Kalavini (at 19, 21, 23, and 25 months), Iakopo (at 25 and 32 months), Pesio (at 27 and 34 months) and Niulala (at 35 and 42 months).

TABLE 11.2. Semantic Roles in Genitive Constructions (Children)

Child/Age	Semantic Roles Encoded:								
<i>Kalavini</i>	POSS	BEN	GL/LC	AG	ACT	EXP	PART	PNT	REL
1;07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1;09	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1;11	1.0 (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2;01	.24 (10)	.63 (26)	.10 (4)	-	-	-	-	.02 (1)	-
Total	.26 (11)	.62 (26)	.10 (4)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	.02 (1)	(0)
<i>Iakopo</i>	POSS	BEN	GL/LC	AG	ACT	EXP	PART	PNT	REL
2;01	-	.67 (2)	-	-	-	-	.33 (1)	-	-
2;08	.33 (17)	.39 (20)	-	.02 (1)	.008 (4)	.06 (3)	.12 (6)	-	-
Total	.31 (17)	.41 (22)	(0)	.02 (1)	.07 (4)	.06 (3)	.13 (7)	(0)	(0)

TABLE 11.2. Semantic Roles in Genitive Constructions (Children)

Child/Age	Semantic Roles Encoded:								
<i>Pesio</i>	POSS	BEN	GL/LC	AG	ACT	EXP	PART	PNT	REL
2;3	.34 (11)	.31 (10)	.09 (3)	.03 (1)	--	--	.03 (1)	.13 (4)	.06 (2)
2;10	.65 (129)	.12 (24)	.07 (13)	.04 (8)	.01 (3)	.02 (4)	.05 (10)	.03 (5)	.01 (2)
Total	.61 (140)	.15 (34)	.07 (16)	.04 (9)	.01 (3)	.02 (4)	.05 (11)	.04 (9)	.02 (4)
<i>Niulala</i>	POSS	BEN	GL/LC	AG	ACT	EXP	PART	PNT	REL
2;11	.21 (20)	.43 (42)	.16 (15)	.02 (2)	.05 (5)	-	.10 (10)	.02 (2)	.01 (1)
3;06	.30 (14)	.22 (10)	.02 (1)	.09 (4)	.02 (1)	.04 (2)	.30 (14)	-	-
Total	.24 (34)	.36 (52)	.11 (16)	.04 (6)	.04 (6)	.01 (2)	.17 (24)	.01 (2)	.01 (1)
Grand Total	.43 (202)	.29 (134)	.08 (36)	.03 (16)	.03 (13)	.02 (9)	.09 (42)	.02 (12)	.01 (5)

Table 11.2 suggests that at an early point in acquisition, children use genitives primarily to express possessor and benefactor roles and rarely express agency. The youngest child, Kalavini, does not encode genitive agents at all. The next youngest child, Iakopo also does not encode genitive agents in the earliest recording session and produces only one seven months later, accounting for 2% of that corpus. Genitive agents account for somewhat more of Pesio's and Niulala's genitive constructions, with the last session of Niulala at 3 years 6 months showing the greatest proportion at 9% (4). These data suggest a developmental pattern towards increased use of genitive NPs to encode Agent roles. If we consider the children's corpus as a whole, we can see that the distribution of genitive Agents in children's genitive constructions differs greatly from adult language patterns. Genitive agents characterize 3% of children's genitive constructions in comparison with 16% of adult genitive constructions.

Examples of children's use of genitive constructions to express agency are presented in (15) through (17) below:

AGENT:

(15) (Pesio, 2;10, speaking to researcher (Elinor))

P: *Egoa!!*  
'Elinor!'

E: Uhm?



- P: *kusi:: -si:: lou aka?!*  
 write -te your picture  
 (lit. 'draw -aw your picture?')  
 'Are you drawing the picture?'  
 (16) (Niulala, 2;11)  
 N: *masae le (ofu)vae (o) Fineaso*  
 ripped the pants (of) Fineaso  
 'Fineaso ripped his pants'  
 AGENT/BENEFACTIVE  
 (17) (Pesio, 2;10)  
 P: *sa fai mâkou mea'ai*  
 TA make our(excl) food  
 'We made food for ourselves.'

### Nominalized Head Nouns

Genitive constructions of children and adults differ as well in terms of complexity of the head noun. As seen in Table 11.3, in adult genitive constructions where the modifier is an agent, actor, or experiencer, the head noun is often a nominalization. As seen in Table 11.4, in children's genitive constructions, nominalizations are both rare and relatively late to be productively acquired.

TABLE 11.3. Nominalized Head Nouns in Genitive Constructions (Adults)

Informal Women's Speech	Informal Men's Speech	Total
.13	.07	.11
(18)	(6)	(24)

TABLE 11.4. Nominalized Head Nouns in Genitive Constructions (Children)

Kalavini		Iakopo		Pesio		Niulala	
Age	Nom.	Age	Nom.	Age	Nom.	Age	Nom.
1;07	-	2;01	-	2;03	-	2;11	.01 (1)
1;09	-	2;08	-	2;10	.01 (2)	3;06	.10 (4)
1;11	-						
2;01	-						

Tables 11.3 and 11.4 indicate that whereas 11% of adult genitive constructions contain nominalizations, nominalized head nouns are absent or rare before children reach 3½

years. To some extent this developmental pattern is linked to the late emergence of agents, actors, and experiencers as genitive modifiers in children's speech. An example of children's use of genitive constructions with nominalized head nouns is provided in (18):

- (18) (Niulala, 3;6)  
 N: *koeafe o'u fasiga oe*  
 never my hitting you  
 'I never hit you'  
*faiaku â koeafe o'u fasiga oe*  
 say EMP never my hitting you  
 'I'm telling you "I never hit you"'

### CONCLUSIONS

The Samoan interactions analyzed here suggest that while Samoan adults and children both favor a clausal strategy of highlighting the affected object in a manipulative activity scene, Samoan children have difficulty exploiting the grammar of genitive noun phrases to encode Agent roles as well. This pattern implies that children's two-constituent utterances differ from those produced by adults. Adults more commonly express agency by means of genitive modifiers in two-constituent utterances (VC + Absolutive NP). In children's utterances, when an Agent is not encoded as Subject of a transitive clause, it is rarely encoded as a genitive modifier.<sup>7</sup> In interpreting children's speech, then, hearers must resort to one of the pragmatic strategies suggested by Du Bois (1987), namely, locating Agent participants in previously mentioned absolutive NPs (or in the immediate setting). In contrast, interpreters of adult speech may locate the agent participant inside the absolutive NP itself.

For all acquirers, the morpho-syntax of noun phrases is an important dimension of linguistic competence. In Samoan, however, and perhaps in other languages with a two-constituent bias, genitive constructions, nominalizations, and other types of complex noun phrases lace even the most informal of conversations. In all kinds of Samoan talk, the absolutive NP in a two-constituent utterance is often heavy, loaded with information concerning human participants and the actions, states, and locations that bind them. Speakers regularly produce such verb-initial utterances as "Look at the stretching of that one" (*va'ai le fa'ake'e'ku'u a lele*), "Exceptional is the anger of the girl" (*'ese fa'ali'i o lea kegikiki*), "Look at the actions of Sio" (*va'ai le fai'iga o Sio*), "Do you know about our going to New Zealand?" (*'e ke iloa 'oe le mâ ôga i Giusila?*). That such constructions are used so often and with such a variety of meanings suggests that the internal

<sup>7</sup> For the expression of agency through Subject constituents in children's discourse, see Ochs (1982, 1988). For adult data, see Duranti (1994), Duranti and Ochs (1990), and Ochs (1982).

structure of the noun phrase is a particularly central domain of grammatical and conversational competence for Samoan children to acquire.

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