L1 RELATED-ISSUES OF TURKISH SPEAKING LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN USE OF POSSESSIVES

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The major purpose of this study is to find out the extent of the influence of first language (Turkish) in use of possessives in second language (L2, English) and whether it is possible to overcome the first language (L1, Turkish) transfer effects in use of possessives through explicit instruction. The participants were 44 students at the beginner level of proficiency being enrolled in a language preparatory program at two private universities in Turkey. To enhance the credibility of the research, data were collected from three different types of sources namely; a translation activity, a multiple-choice activity and a picture description activity. The findings revealed that Turkish, as a mother tongue, had both positive and negative effect on learning English possessive structures both due to the similarities and differences between the two languages.

Keywords: Language transfer, Use of possessives, Explicit instruction.

Introduction

Life includes joy, peace, values, affairs and experiences with mistakes that human beings make. There is no life without mistakes or no mistake without an attempt. Riding a bicycle cannot be learned without falling off, or you cannot learn to swim in your first attempt. There are many examples that can be shown to indicate how mistakes take place in our everyday lives. They play an important role in many aspects of human life. People make mistakes when they start to do something new, when they want to learn a new skill, when they try to get accustomed to a new life or when they spend time to learn a new language. They even make mistakes while doing the things they are quite familiar with. Although it takes time to acquire a skill properly, mistakes and errors can also be the best teachers if they are exploited thoroughly. They help individuals define the problems they have and determine the strategies about how to avoid or change the wrong behaviors. If they can be used as a step to reach the target, nothing can be more useful than the errors for a person. Mistakes and errors are invaluable, especially in language learning process. They provide a great deal of knowledge about how this process progresses. According to Corder (1967), a learner’s errors and mistakes are significant because they provide evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language. Therefore, error analysis has an important place in both first and second language learning processes. In addition to studies conducted to reveal types of errors made while learning a second language, the reasons behind these errors are also one of the main concerns that have been studied by linguists over years.

First of all, it is necessary to make a distinction between errors and mistakes. Although these two terms can sometimes be used interchangeably, it is important to know the differences between the two in second language teaching processes. Hasyim (2002) emphasizes that mistake is not something systematic.
If a student knows the rule but doesn’t use it because of some factors like carelessness or lack of attention, this is called a ‘mistake’. These types of mistakes can be ignored because we know that this is not due to lack of knowledge. However, if a student doesn’t learn something properly and uses it wrongly, this is seen as an ‘error’. Brown (2000) asserts that mistakes, when attention is called to them, can be self-corrected; however errors are manifestations of a wrong system that a learner is operating and they reveal a portion of the learner’s competence in the target language. Like Brown, Touchie (1986) accepts the difference between these two concepts, but he calls “mistakes” as performance mistakes. According to him, these errors are the ones made by learners when they are tired or hurried. He expresses that these mistakes are not so serious and can be overcome with little effort by the learner. In addition to this type of error, he asserts another type: competence errors that reflect inadequate learning as in Brown’s perception. Throughout the years, researchers have been studying these error types both in first and second language acquisition because error analysis is a crucial issue in language learning process in many ways. In his article Learners’ Errors and Error Correction in Language Teaching, Karra (2006) states that errors are significant because they show students’ progress; they show how a language is acquired, what strategies the learners use and they help learners learn from these errors. Erdogan (2005) also stresses the same thing and says that error analysis is significantly important because errors provide an understanding of the underlying process of second language acquisition.

Different definitions are attached to types of ‘error’. Overt and covert errors are the main types of errors and show differences when compared. Hasyim (2002) explains that if an error is ungrammatical, it is an overt error. Covert errors, on the other hand, are the ones (Corder 1973; Faercli 1984; Medges 1989; Catalan ND), which do not appear on the structure of the utterance but are present within the message. For example “I am 10 years old” is grammatically correct but if it is given as an answer to “how are you?” it becomes a covert error.

Burt and Kiparsky (1975, as cited in Elliott) also suggest that errors can be classified as local and global errors. They state that if there is just one single error in an utterance and unless it affects the meaning of the sentence, this error is accepted as a local error. However, if it affects the meaning and makes the communication difficult to understand, they are called global errors.

Corder (1973) classifies the errors in terms of the difference between the learners’ utterance and the reconstructed version. Erdogan (2005) divides the errors into four categories and gives examples for each category. These four categories are as follows:

- **Omission of some required element**: A strange thing happen to me yesterday.
- **Addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element**: The books is here.
- **Selection of incorrect element**: My friend is oldest than me.
- **Disordering of the elements**: “Key car” for “car key”

So, why do human beings make these errors in second language learning process? What are the sources of these types of errors? Brown (2000) in his book, Principles of language teaching and learning, classifies the sources of errors into 4 categories. ‘Communication Strategies’ is one of them. Sylvia & Tiono (2009) write that a communication strategy is defined as “a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his or her meaning when faced with some difficulty” (Corder, 1981). According to Brown, learners may use some communicative strategies to enhance their massage but these strategies may become errors, as well. Heydari and Bagheri (2012) state that these communication strategies are the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learner for some reasons. These strategies help learners go on their conversation. Some cognitive strategies discussed by Dörnyei (1995) are ‘topic change’ which is about changing topic when it is difficult to talk about, and “approximation” which means using the most similar word instead of the word learner wants to use because he/she doesn’t know that word.

‘Context of learning’ is another source of errors. Brown (2000) explains that context refers, for example, to classroom with its teacher and its material. The teacher and the material, in terms of the knowledge they are teaching, are crucial issues. Teachers or books may guide students in a wrong way and make them learn false things. Heydari and Bagheri (2012) also support that teacher or the textbook
can lead the learner to make wrong generalizations about the language. Richard (1971) and Stenson (1974) call these errors as ‘false concepts’ or ‘induced errors’.

‘Intralingual transfer’ is the third source of errors. Heydari (2012) explains that these types of errors are caused by the target language itself. Richard (1971) also defines that intralingual errors are those that reflect the general characteristics of rule learning. He lists four common types of them. Overgeneralization is the most widely known one. The learner applies an already known rule to another structure such as saying “goed” instead of “went”. Ignorance of rule restriction is another topic accepted as a source of error by Richard (1971). Students sometimes cannot realize that some rules are not applied to all structures. In the sentence “I have him to wash the dishes”, learner ignores the rule restriction about the usage of -to with the rule “have somebody do something” and apply the same rule. From this perspective, this can be seen as a kind of overgeneralization. The third reason for intralingual errors is incomplete application of rules. Heydari and Bagheri (2012) state that this is the converse of overgeneralization or one might call it under generalization, as the learners do not use all the rules. And the last one of these reasons is false concepts. According to Richard (1971), these errors are sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items.

Finally, the last and most effective sources are interlingual errors. James (1998, as cited in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012) defines that the native languages, which interfere with target language learning, influence these kinds of errors. In other words, these are the errors that are caused by the learner’s native language. Erdogan (2005) states that intralingual errors may occur at different levels such as transfer of phonological, morphological or grammatical elements of native language into target language. She gives specific examples about Turkish students who make these kinds of errors. She explains that Turkish students, for example, attempt to pronounce ‘th’ of thank you as /t/ of ‘tea’ as that sound does not occur in Turkish. Moreover, since nouns are not made plural when they are written with numbers in Turkish such as “Üç kitabım var.”, students don’t use plural ‘s’ in English, as well, and say, “I have three book”. It is obvious that native language has a strong effect on the second language. Therefore, finding out the reasons why native language affects the target language is also a comprehensive issue.

Language Transfer

Language transfer (or L1 interference) refers to language learners applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. It is the transfer of linguistic features from one language to another language. According to Ellis, (1997), L1 transfer is governed by learners’ perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning.

Transfer is an inevitable stage in second language acquisition. Brown (2000:68 as cited in Nazary, 2008) claims, “first language can be a facilitating factor and not just an interfering factor”. Although transfer is sometimes a supportive function for language learners, they might still end up expressing their thoughts and feelings incorrectly by making incomprehensible sentences. Therefore, differences between languages should be taken into consideration in order to deal with transfer errors. Language teachers must be aware of these differences between native and target language in order to prevent errors and they must have an action plan to deal with them. There are two types of transfer: positive and negative. When the linguistic interference results in correct language production, it is called positive transfer or ‘facilitation’. If a grammatical feature is functionally similar in the L1 and L2, then the learner is more likely to transfer the rule from L1 to L2. However, if the learner’s second language induces to error, we will be referring to negative transfer or ‘interference’, which is usually the case when two languages are different from each other (Wilkins, 1972).

Interference Errors

Dulay et al (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer due to habit of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Likewise, Lott (1983: 256) interprets interference as
“errors in the learner’s use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue”. By considering these two definitions, it is possible to deduce that interference errors reflect the use of elements such as lexis, morphology and syntax from one language to the other in the process of learning.

According to Kavaliauskiene (2009: 4), transfer of errors may occur because the learners lack either the necessary information in the second language or the attentional capacity to activate the appropriate second language routine. This explains why most learners experience the problem of L1 interference at lower levels; when they know little about the target language. The common perception of the language learner at this stage is that target language can be used in a way, which is very similar to the learner’s mother tongue, and therefore they try to express their thoughts by making literal translation.

According to Corder (1967), a learner’s errors provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using because language learners have the tendency to transfer the forms and meanings and the uses and functions of those forms and meanings in their native language to the foreign language and culture (Lado, 1957). According to him, they do this both productively; when attempting to write or speak the language, and receptively; when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives.

The Link between Native Language and Target Language in making Interference Errors

According to Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, errors occur as a result of interference when the learners transfer native language habits into L2. It is also believed that interference takes place whenever there is a difference between mother tongue and the target language. In other words, “if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2” (Dechert, 1983 and Ellis, 1997). Dechert also (1983) suggests that the further apart the two languages are structurally, the higher the instances of errors made in L2 which bear traces of L1 structures. The similarity between the languages usually depends on whether the languages come from the same family. Turkish, for instance, belongs to Turkic language family whereas English belongs to Germanic language family. This explains why German and English, likewise Turkish and Azerbaijani languages are structurally and semantically closer to each other. “Asian/East Asian languages have much less in common ground in terms of sentence structure, word order, formation of plurals, and the sounds themselves” (Haussamen & Herron, 2003). For this reason, to successfully learn L2 requires the L2 learner to often preclude the L1 structures from the L2 learning process, if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different (Bhela, 1999).

Use of Possessive Structures in English and Turkish

Every language contains possessive domains in their structure. Although some languages may present some similarities in the way possessives are used—since they come from the same language family, many of them differ from each other in this regard. Seiler (1983) defines possession as “a bio-cultural domain involving a relationship between a prototypically human possessor (PR), in most cases presented as the topic, and the possessum (PM), normally the comment”. Thus, it may be said that possession is the linguistic expression between the PR and PM (Baron, & Herslund, 2001).

McGregor (2009, as cited in Muguiru, 2013) describes three types of possession: attributive, predicative and external possession. Attributive possession occurs when the PM and the PR expressions form a noun phrase (NP), for example, ‘my pencil, the garden of our neighbors, John’s phone’. On the other hand, predicative possession refers to the possessive relationship which is encoded by a two-place predicate such as ‘have, own, belong, or by be’, for example, ‘I have a cat, the cat belongs to me, or the cat is mine’ (Eisenbeiss, Matsuo, & Sonnenstuhl, 2009). Lastly, when the possessive relation is not mentioned by the lexical verb or in the NP, but expressed at the level of a clausal construction, is an example of external possession (McGregor, 2009). The clausal construction in the sentence ‘He punched me in the face!’ is an example of external possession.
In Turkish, only the first two types exist and they are constructed differently despite little resemblance to English. Regarding attributive possessive constructions, both English and Turkish use possessive pronouns. Pronouns may be omitted in the latter one, though. In English, nominal possession may be presented in two ways. Either adding the ‘s marker to the PR (e.g. Jane’s book) or placing the preposition of between the PR and PM (e.g. the knob of the door) is possible. In Turkish, however, both words in the NP are marked most of the time and both the PR and PM are suffixed. Besides, a harmony of vowels is required within the suffixes. To exemplify, ‘araba’ means ‘car’ in Turkish. In this case, the NP ‘John’s car’ would be ‘John’un arabası’ in Turkish. The fact that a prepositional possessive such as of doesn’t exist in Turkish causes problems among Turkish learners of English in differentiating the use of pre-nominal possessive -’s and post-nominal possessive of.

Regarding predicative possession, although Turkish vocabulary consists of the verb ‘have’ when referring to something that someone has, the word ‘var’ (which substitute for ‘there is’ structure in English) is preferred in Turkish. Since the word ‘var’ is an adjective in Turkish and the word ‘have’ a verb in English, Turkish learners of English find it difficult to transfer L1 knowledge into L2 and tend to say ‘There is my cat’ instead of saying ‘I have a cat’ (bir kedim var).

As it is seen, errors in second language learning and their analysis have been one of the main issues, which have been studied by prominent linguists for many years. The analysis of these second language errors gives researchers unique information about process of second language learning and inspires them to search more. While learning context, communication strategies or intralingual transfer are 3 main sources that errors come from, interlanguage transfer which is about L1 influences on L2 is the preeminent one and it may result in both positive and negative way according to the differences and similarities between native language and target language. It is known that, errors are common in many linguistic features while learning a new language and the issue of “possessives” is the one that this study is focused on.

Research Design

Setting and Participants

Most Turkish private universities offer an intensive English language-learning program called ‘preparatory or prep year’. The general aim of prep programs in Turkey is to teach learners basic language skills such as reading, writing, listening and make them academically capable of using the English language effectively in their faculties.

In the preparatory programs of private universities, the prospective students are admitted to their departments following a two-stage English language test at the beginning of each academic year, which is designed to assess whether or not they are capable of following their academic studies in the respective faculties. Students whose results are below the average of 60 (out of 100) are enrolled in preparatory program.

In the university of control group, there are 5 levels (beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate), each of which lasts for 8 weeks with 20-25 hours of instruction. The students are expected to complete Level 5 in order to begin their departmental studies. As for the university of experimental group, there are 3 elementary, 2 intermediate and 55 beginner classes. There are morning, afternoon and evening classes. While afternoon and evening classes consist of foundation degree (2-year) students, morning class students are undergraduate degree students.

For the purposes of this study, the participants were morning class students who had 20 hours of English instruction per week.

In order to reinforce language learning and skills, the preparatory school of both universities provides its learners with;

- CALL centers (Computer Assisted Learning Centers): to give students the opportunity to improve their English by doing online activities on online learning websites and especially designed software
- Resource Library and Digital Library where students can borrow books appropriate for their needs
- Writing and Learning Center where students can improve their writing with the help of tutors in their free time
- Writing, Reading, Grammar and Speaking workshops to improve students’ language skills with communicative practice
- Instructor’s Tutorials to give students the opportunity to work with instructors one on one or in small groups
- Online Studies to give students opportunity to study materials and practice exercises that go along with their course books by themselves
- English Clubs e.g. cinema club, debate club, poetry club and theater club to support extracurricular activities that enable the genuine practice of the language under the supervision of instructors.

In this study, the data was collected from for one academic semester. The subjects of control group were 24, Level-2 (elementary) repeat students with an age range from 18 to 20 years old. All students took the placement test at the beginning of the academic year and they all started the year as Level-2 learners. However, they failed the level either due to absenteeism or their low grades.

In addition, the subjects of experimental group were 20 elementary students who started the semester as beginner students and have recently passed this level. Similar to the control group, the participating students’ age range was from 18-20 years old.

The reason why these groups of students were selected for this research is that elementary level learners lack many basic language skills and they tend to depend more on their mother tongue while using the target language. In other words, their L1 (Turkish) might influence their L2 (English) language learning and practicing process.

Apart from the proficiency level, there was another variable that was taken under control by the researchers. Specifically, the students in the control group might have tried to do better to pass the experimental group's results if they were studying in the same university which could have affected the results of the study negatively. Therefore, each group was chosen from different schools to eliminate this factor.

Data Collection Instruments

Three different types of data sources – a translation activity (see appendix 1, appendix 2) a multiple-choice activity (see appendix 3, appendix 4), a picture description activity (see appendix 5) were comprised to obtain data about how much speakers of Turkish are influenced by their mother tongue in use of possessives in English. Two similar activities were prepared for each type of data source; one to be applied before explicit instruction and the other one to be applied after explicit instruction. The reason behind using a variety of sources was to increase the credibility of the research.

Translation Activity

This activity consisted of 10 sentences in Turkish (see appendix 1, appendix 2). All the sentences contained at least one possessive structure. The students were expected to translate all the sentences into English. Errors related to other structures except for possessives were ignored.

Multiple-Choice Activity

This activity was made up of 15 sentences in English all of which lacked the possessive structure (see appendix 3, appendix 4). The students were expected to circle the correct answer among the 4 options A, B, C, or D to complete the sentences with the correct possessive structure.
Picture Description Activity

This was a semi-controlled writing activity. The students were expected to describe a picture of a sister and brother’s room, which they shared together (see appendix 5). They were asked to write at least 10 sentences about the picture. The picture contained belongings of the sister and brother. Thus, the students could use possessives when they referred to the possessions of the sister or brother. Errors related to other structures except for possessives were ignored.

Data Collection Procedure

Since the present study was conducted with an already assembled group, it has the characteristics of a quasi-experimental research. As it is important to have equal groups in terms of proficiency level in this kind of experimental research studies, the participants were chosen among the sample whose proficiency exam results are almost equal and study in the same class. Having students at equal levels is significant to see how effective the independent variable that was used in the study is. The only threat for the reliability issue was not being sure about whether level of students’ pre-existing knowledge is equal or not in terms of possessives. Although their proficiency level was the same, the possessive knowledge of might vary. To minimize this threat, a lower level of students, beginners, were chosen.

To choose the most appropriate testing items, all questions and instructions were evaluated with 5 native and 5 nonnative teachers who were experienced and know the language problems that students have well. Taking their opinions into consideration, 20 translation and 30 multiple-choice questions were selected to use both in pre-test and post-test. Questions were divided into two; half of them were used in pre-test while the rest was used in post-test. The reason why two different parallel tests were administered is to have a coefficient research which eliminates the memory effect. If students remember the questions, they may not concentrate on the answers and just give the same answers they remember from the pre-test just to finish the test. In other words, different but parallel questions were given to subjects to eliminate the memory effect. Otherwise, the memory factor might have had a negative effect on the reliability of the research results. Moreover, to eliminate the chance factor in multiple-choice test, four options were given for each question and the length of the test was arranged properly to cover all aspects of the use of possessives. For more accurate results, Google Drive was used to enable researchers conduct the research online and prepare detailed charts.

A pilot study was also conducted to be sure about whether all instructions and questions were clear for the subjects who were beginners. For pilot testing, a different beginner prep class was chosen. According to their results and comments about the tests, 2 items in translation activity and 4 items in multiple-choice test were changed and made clearer. Not having an ambiguous question or instruction for subjects also enhanced the creditability of the research.

During the data collection process, the participants were taken to computer labs of the university and given a pre-test which included a picture-description activity, a translation activity and a multiple choice test. Students answered all questions in an online platform. They were given 20 minutes for each part and 60 minutes in total to complete the tests and their data were collected for analysis.

The following week, the training started and subjects received an explicit instruction about possessives. Students had two courses for possessives in a week. Instruction lasted four courses; 160 minutes in total. After the treatment, the participating students were given a post-test which measured the same knowledge with different but similar questions in the following week. The answers of this test were also collected for analysis and comparison with pre-test scores.

Results

Translation Test Results

Translation test was the first data collection instrument used to find out the L1 effect on the usage of L2 possessives. The test included 10 sentences in Turkish, each of which had at least one possessive
structure. The participants were to translate the sentences into English using the correct possessive form. The errors not related to the usage of possessives were not taken into consideration.

The control group consisted of 24 students. Each one of them took a translation test with 10 items. As a result, 240 items were obtained from the participants. In total, 135 items were translated correctly out of 240 items, which indicates that 56.25% of the items were translated successfully. On the other hand, there were 20 students in the treatment group and 200 items were collected from the participants. The number of items that were translated correctly in this group was 186, which means that 93% of the items were translated successfully.

The results showed that the treatment group (93%) was much more successful in the use of possessives compared to the control group (56.25%). There was a slight difference in the translation of a word that indicates the existence of something (var) in L1 into a possessive structure (has) in L2 (Melis has 3 cats.). The percentage of the control group was 83.3 while the percentage of the treatment group was 75. The result of the treatment group was lower than the result of the control group. This might be because of focusing too much on the structure.

No significant difference was observed between the control group (87.5%) and the treatment group (85%) in the usage of a proper noun with ‘apostrophe + s’ which doesn’t end with –s (Mehmet’s phone is older than Melih’s phone). However, the treatment group (85%) was more successful with usage of ‘apostrophe + s’ with a proper noun which ends with –s than the control group (54.1%).

The most dramatic difference was observed with the translation of an external possession at the level of a clausal construction (He punched me in the face.). This structure is used very differently in Turkish. That’s why; none of the participants in the control group was able to translate it correctly. On the other hand, 75% of the treatment group was successful at translating it after explicit instruction.

Another significant difference was with the usage of ‘one of’ (One of my friends invited me to Italy.). While only 8.3% of the control group translated this item correctly, 70% of the treatment group did it correctly. Translation of a plural noun by using just an apostrophe without -s from L1 into L2 (What are your friends’ names?) was another item with a significant difference between the two groups. No one did it right in the control group. However, 60% of the treatment group was successful at translating this item.

The control group wasn’t much successful (%12.5) at the translation of a word that indicates the existence of something (var) in L1 into the structure ‘there is/are’ or ‘have’ in L2 (There is a parrot on your shoulder / You have a parrot on your shoulder) although it could be translated in both ways which the participants should have been familiar with. Yet, 75% of the treatment group was successful at the translation of this structure.

Regarding the rest of the items not mentioned specifically, the treatment group obtained significantly higher percentages than the control group. The results of the translation test overall put forward that the explicit instruction affected the usage possessives in L2 positively. There has been a significant decrease in L1 interference in the usage of possessives in L2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Results from the Translation Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Results of the Translation Test for</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>the Control Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Results of the Translation Test for</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>the Treatment Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of correct items / Total number of students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of ‘apostrophe + s’ with a proper noun which doesn’t end with –s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmet’in telefonu Melih’in telefonundan eski.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmet’s phone is older than Melih’s phone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usage of ‘**apostrophe + s**’ with a proper noun which ends with –s

- James’ın eşî Türk.
- James’s wife is Turkish.

| 13/24 | 17/20 |
| 54.1% | 85% |

Translation of a plural noun by using just an apostrophe without -s from L1 into L2

- Arkadaşlarımı isimleri ne?
- What are your friends’ names?
- What are the names of your friends?

| 0/24 | 12/20 |
| 0% | 60% |

Using ’**of**’ as a possessive structure to express belongingness in L2 while it is provided with a suffix in L1

- İstanbul Türkiye’nin en büyük şehridir.
- İstanbul is the biggest city in/of Turkey.

| 14/24 | 17/20 |
| 58.3% | 85% |

Usage of ’**one of**’

- Bir arkadaşım beni İtalya’ya davet etti.
- One of my friends invited me to Italy.
- A friend of mine invited me to Italy.

| 2/24 | 14/20 |
| 8.3% | 70% |

Translations of a word that indicates the existence of something (**var**) in L1 into a possessive structure (**has**) in L2

- Melis’in 3 kedisi **var**.
- Melis has 3 cats.

| 20/24 | 15/20 |
| 83.3% | 75% |

Translations of a word that indicates the existence of something (**var**) in L1 into the structure ‘**there is/are**’ in L2

- Omuzunda bir papağan **var**.
- There is a parrot on your shoulder.
- You have a parrot on your shoulder.

| 3/24 | 15/20 |
| 12.5% | 75% |

Translation of a possessive noun construction whose each word takes an affix in L1 (Kerem’in kardeşi) into an English possessive phrase whose just first word takes affix. (Kerem’s brother)

- Dün Hayrî’nin erkek kardeşiğini gördüm.
- I saw Hayri’s brother yesterday.

| 23/24 | 18/20 |
| 95.8% | 90% |

Translation of a possessive suffix (**Arabamın**) with a possessive noun construction whose each word takes an affix in L1 (Arabamın Caması) into an English possessive phrase whose just first word takes an affix (Car’s window) and use possessive pronoun instead of a possessive suffix (**My car’s window**)

- Arabamın caması kırdı.
- My car’s window was broken.

| 11/24 | 16/20 |
| 45.8% | 80% |

Usage of ‘**belongs to**’ or ‘**possessive pronouns**’ in L2

- O kitap bana **ait**.
- That book **belongs to** me.
- That book is **mine**.

| 12/24 | 17/20 |
| 50% | 85% |
Translation of a Turkish sentence which has possessive structure into a common English one that doesn’t have any possessive

Ali’nin karnı acıktı.
Ali is hungry.

Translation of an external possession at the level of a clausal construction

Yüzümе yumruk attı.
He punched me in the face.

Multiple-Choice Test Results

Multiple-choice tests are second data collection instruments to find out if L1 has an effect on L2 possessive usage and to see if explicit instruction about possessive affects the performance of students in terms of using possessives. 5 main aspects of possessives were measured with 15 multiple-choice questions and results are as the following:

Basic Possessive Phrases

The effect of instruction is mostly seen on the possessive phrases (mother’s name) which are also constructed by a possessive adjective such as ‘my’ (e.g. My mother’s name). The questions 3 and 9 were measuring this knowledge and it was seen that instruction worked well with this aspect. Almost all students were able to choose the correct options in post-test while most of the students chose the phrases that don't take any possessive suffix (My mother name is) in pre-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average of the students who gave the correct answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Control Group)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although students also use a possessive suffix in their native language in these kinds of phrases (Annom-in adı), the percentage of students who were not able to choose the correct option is very high. It is seen that students don't make connection with their mother tongue in this regard; otherwise they were supposed to choose the option which takes possessive suffix -s (My mother's name)

Plural Possessive Phrases

Secondly, students were taught how to turn a plural noun into a possessive phrase. It was stressed that plural nouns don’t take the suffix -s after apostrophe; i.e. just apostrophe was enough except from some irregular plural nouns like children, men or women.
**Example:** Students' books are over there  
Children's books are over there

In students' native language, even plural nouns take a possessive suffix, so the result of the questions 7th, 10th and 14th measuring this knowledge was important for the study. The results are as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average of the students who gave the correct answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Control)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Results of Plural Possessives

Students may have not been able to make these questions correct because Turkish language doesn’t have a rule, which says plural nouns don’t take possessive suffix -s except from irregular ones such as feet. However, this low accuracy percentage may also result from the widely usage of ‘-s’ after apostrophe.

**Use of ‘one of’**

Pre-tests showed that usage of ‘one’ as a pronoun is something unknown for students. None of the students were able write “one of my friends” in translation activity. Similarly, most of the students got the ‘one of’ question wrong in multiple-choice test. In the treatment session, students were taught that the pronoun ‘one’ could be used with or without ‘-of’. However it must be used with an ‘-of’ and plural form of a noun together when they want to mean one person among other people.

**Example:** One (student) made fun of her.  
One of the students made fun of her.

While just 50% of students in control group could choose the correct option in pre-test, 90% of students gave the right answer in post-test. In Turkish, a noun is also used as plural when it is used with this phrase ‘one of’, however most of the students chose the option in which noun is singular. So the effect of native language is also not seen in this aspect of possessives.

**Example:**
- Arkadaş-la-r-imdan biri
- One of my friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average of the students who gave the correct answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Control)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Results of “one of” Structure
Successive Possessive Constructions

During the treatment, students were taught that possessive phrases such as “Mehmet's car” can also be formed as “car of Mehmet”, however in successive possessive constructions, they should prefer to form one of them by using -of.

Example:

Instead of “Mehmet's car's keys”

“Keys of Mehmet's car” should be used

The questions, 2nd, 4th, 11th and 12th were prepared to measure this knowledge. After the treatment, the percentage of students who answered these questions correctly increased considerably in post-test. While the general accuracy percentage for these 4 questions was 40% in control group, it increased in number and became 75% after instruction in post-test of Experimental group.

In Turkish, successive possessive constructions are formed as the following:

- Mehmet’in arabasının anahtarları (keys of Mehmet’s car)
- Teyzemin evinin kapısının anahtarları (keys of the door of my aunt’s house)

In other words, nouns come one after the other to form successive possessive constructions. It is possible that, students were affected by their mother tongue and chose mostly the option “Mehmet's car's keys” before instruction. Even after the instruction, the percentage of the students that gave the correct answer was the lowest one among the other percentages of post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Results of Successive Constructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average of the students who gave the correct answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Experimental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (Experimental)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of Possessive Pronoun

Use of possessive pronoun was the last aspect that the instruments were trying to measure. All students in experimental group received a comprehensive instruction about possessive pronouns to distinguish them from possessive adjectives. Students were also taught how a proper noun can be used as a possessive pronoun.

Example: This book is mine

This book is Emma's.

5th, 6th, 8th and 13th ones were the questions that measured this knowledge. These 4 questions were divided into 2 and included these 2 different aspects given in the example. It was observed that the accuracy rate was 40% in control group and this rate became 80% in experimental group after instruction.

The effects of L1 are also seen mostly in this aspect of possessives. Although the word “benim” is an adjective pronoun in Turkish, it can be used as possessive pronoun. There is also a suffix ‘–ki’ to express belongings, however it is optional and rarely used.
Example: This book is mine

mine

Bu kitap benim (ki)
(my)

Because of this, students mostly chose the option which has possessive adjective. This also shows that L1 knowledge affects how we think in the target language.

Table 6. Results of Possessive Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average of the students who gave the correct answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (Control)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (Experimental)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effect of Instruction

When the effect of instruction is measured, it is seen that, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-test of experimental group. Moreover, it is seen that, students did better when they were given options rather than self-production as translation activity. In both cases, students’ mistakes decreased considerably after the treatment session.

Table 7. Effect of Instruction on Overall Multiple Choice Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRE-TEST</th>
<th>POST-TEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGE OF CORRECT ANSWERS</td>
<td>9,73</td>
<td>16,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGE OF INCORRECT ANSWERS</td>
<td>10,26</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Picture Description Results

By looking at the results from both groups, it is also possible to infer that the learners who received instruction are more aware of the different ways of talking about the same thing as they use variety of structures with possessives (see Figure 5). The instruction clearly proves its benefits at this point. However, when the results are observed in depth, it is seen that the learners are still not capable of producing sentences accurately even after instruction.

The experimental group makes more mistakes compared to the control group in usage of ‘have/has’ to refer to possessives. One possible reason for this might be related to the control group’s prior knowledge of present simple tense. The group had been under basic instruction of present tenses for over three weeks before they were given this test. Therefore, it is highly probable that the learners depended on their background knowledge of present simple tense when they took the test. This also explains the reason why they preferred to write 82% of their sentences with ‘have/has’ structures and how 95% of them achieved to write grammatically accurate sentences.

The structure whose usage proves no clear-cut distinction with/without instruction is possessive ‘–s’. Although the experimental group uses this structure two times more than the control group, there is no
significant discrepancy between the numbers of correct answers. This situation can be considered as
normal when the learners’ L1 is compared to English. In Turkish, there is only one agglutinative
possessive suffix, which can be used with any noun whether it is singular or plural. The only distinction in
Turkish possessive (-nin/nın) is the way it is added at the end of a common or proper noun;

- Tolga’ın telefonu kayıp. (Tolga’s phone is lost) – apostrophe is necessary after a proper noun
- Bebeğin oyuncağı. (The baby’s toy). – apostrophe not used with common nouns

Another distinction in Turkish is that the possessive (-nin) can also be added at the end of plural
nouns and nouns ending with letter –s unlike English.

- Ailelerin davranışları. (Families’ behaviors)
- Enes’in ceketi. (Enes’ jacket)

What is more, possessive pronouns in both languages also differ in their usage; in Turkish the subject
pronoun ‘o’ means ‘he/she/it’, and the possessive pronouns in Turkish are formed by adding the suffix ‘-
in’ as aforementioned. However, in English the possessive pronouns are represented by totally different
words.

- O’nun evi (Her/His house)
- Onların arabası (Their car)

Considering these distinctions between the two languages, it is observed that learners’ mistakes are
significantly influenced by their L1 as exemplified below:

- ‘The beds color’ instead of ‘The bed’s color’
- ‘She’s books’ instead of ‘Her books’

‘There is/are’ is another structure where L1 transfer directly influences the way learners write their
sentences. Most of learners’ mistakes are related to singular/plural noun choice (see Table 8), as there is
no such distinction in Turkish;

Odada iki lamba var (There are two lambs in the room) is written as:
There are two lamb in the room.

The learners have the inclination to write the nouns as singular nouns in English, just like they do in
Turkish, because in Turkish the numbers themselves pluralize the nouns automatically and thus there is
no need for a plural ‘s’.

a) Results of the Control Group

Vast majority of the students prefer to use basic forms ‘have/has’ (see Figure 1) possessive structures to
describe the pictures.

![Figure 1. The most commonly preferred structures](image-url)
The most common types of errors with the use of ‘have/has’ possessive structures are usually related to the use of singular/plural nouns. However, these kinds of grammatical errors were ignored and marked as ‘accurate’ since they are related to the singular/plural noun and article use rather than the possessive structure.

### Table 8. Singular Plural Noun Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular/Plural Noun Errors</th>
<th>Missing Article Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They have <em>a books.</em></td>
<td>They have <em>X wardrobe.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela has <em>two lamb.</em></td>
<td>Angela has <em>X pink bed.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The errors, which affect the use of possessives directly, and marked ‘incorrect’ are as the following:

### Table 9. The uses of Possessives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorrect Conjugation of ‘have’</th>
<th>Incorrect Auxiliary Conjugation</th>
<th>Incorrect Word Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin <em>have</em> a more poster than Angela.</td>
<td>Angela <em>don’t</em> have a wardrobe.</td>
<td>The ball has a Martin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The marking done according to criteria shows that very high percentage of students can use this structure correctly and effortlessly.

![Figure 2. Usages of have/has](image)

The second most common structure used by the students is possessive ‘-‘s’. The students made most of their errors in the following uses.

### Table 10. The Usages of Apostrophes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Omission of -s</th>
<th>Omission of apostrophe</th>
<th>Incorrect use of apostrophe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Angela’s</em> paint is on the carpet.</td>
<td>Martin’s bed is white.</td>
<td>Martins’ ball is in front of wardrobe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| She’s books. | *Her’s* books. | Both’s books. |

Among all the structures, possessive ‘-‘s’ is the feature that the learners have the most incorrect sentences with.
The third most commonly used structure while describing the pictures is ‘there is/are’ structures to talk about the existence of the objects in the room.

Table 11. The most common errors in the usage of ‘there is/are’ structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular/Plural Errors</th>
<th>False Attempts to Use ‘there is/are’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is two lambs in the room.</td>
<td>(...) paint on the carpet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(...) draper on the window.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some uses of ‘there is/are’ were accepted although the sentences were not grammatically accurate because the errors were not related to ‘there is/are’ use, but rather to singular/plural noun or article use.

Table 12. Accepted usages of ‘these is/are’ structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular/Plural Noun Errors</th>
<th>Missing Article Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are two lamb in the room.</td>
<td>There is X basket in Angelas part in the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a lot of poster in the room.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall performance of the learners in their effective use of ‘there is/are’ structures is as follows;
b) Results of the Experimental Group

As mentioned before, the experimental group is the group that receives the instruction about possessive structures before they are tested. The results show that there is a considerable difference between the control group and experimental group in terms of their preference of structures while describing the pictures in figure 5.

When compared to the control group (see Figure 1), it is still noticed that learners prefer ‘have/has’ structures the most although the rate is almost half of that of the control group. While possessive ‘–’s’ is used double more than the control group, the preference of ‘there is/are’ structures are almost five times more than that of the control group.

![The most commonly preferred structures to describe pictures](image)

**Figure 5.** Distribution of commonly preferred structures

Although the experimental group received instruction in possessive structures ‘have/has’, they made more mistakes compared to control group, which received no instruction.

![Usage of have/has](image)

**Figure 6.** Usages of have/has
Surprisingly, there is no considerable change in use of possessive ‘–’s’ in spite of instruction.

![Figure 7. Usages of possessives](image)

The only structure that seems to have changed for the better is ‘there is/are’ structure. The experimental group learners do not only prefer to use it more than the other structures, but they also start to use it with fewer mistakes compared to others (see Figure 4).

![Figure 8. Usages of there is/are](image)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study attempted to find out how much native speakers of Turkish (L1) are influenced by their mother tongue in use of possessives in English (L2) and whether it is possible to overcome these transfer effects regarding the use of possessives with explicit instruction. As Corder (1967) claims, a learner’s errors and mistakes are significant because they provide evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language. Therefore, the study consisted of 3 data collection instruments that measured knowledge of students about all aspects of possessives. Moreover, all data collection tools aimed to reveal the most common errors and mistakes the learners make due to L1 transfer. The most common error type among students is seen in plural nouns that take possessive ‘–’s’. In students' native language, even plural nouns take a possessive suffix. Students may have not been able to correct them because Turkish language doesn’t have a rule which says plural nouns don’t take possessive suffix ‘–’s’ except from irregular ones such as feet. However, this low accuracy percentage may also result from the widely usage of ‘–’s’ after apostrophe.
Other common problem is seen in successive possessive constructions. It is possible that, students were affected by their mother tongue and chose mostly the option “Mehmet's car's keys” before instruction. Even after the instruction, the percentage of the students that gave the correct answer was the lowest one among the other percentages of post-test.

All in all, results reveal that many form of L2 possessive structures are affected by the mother tongue of the subjects, or as Lott (1983) states; the learners’ use of foreign language can be traced back to the mother tongue'. There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test, which was administered after explicit instruction. Firstly, it is seen that before the instruction stage, students cannot use the structures that are formed differently in English and Turkish accurately. These structures are generally clausal constructions, successive possessive constructions, plural nouns that take possessives and some plural/singular structures with possessives. As Corder (1967) states, learners’ errors provide evidence of the system of the language they are using. When the answers of the students were analyzed, it was observed that they form English sentences by using their existing mother tongue knowledge. Therefore, many structures such as “cars's keys”, “he punched my face”, “house's door's keys”, or “there are two lamp” were seen in students' pre-test.

Secondly, results showed that, structures that are the same in both languages were formed accurately by most of the students even in post-test, therefore it can be concluded that students apply their mother tongue knowledge to the target language. Moreover, results of the post-test revealed that, explicit instruction could overcome the L1-related issues in use of possessives.

This study showed that Turkish, as a mother tongue, has both positive and negative effect on the acquisition of possessives in English. Native speakers of Turkish are influenced by their L1 considerably and this case has an impact on their use of target language.

References


**Appendices**

**Appendix 1**

*Verilen cümlelerin İngilizce karşılıklarını yazınız.*

1. Ali’nin karnı acıktı.

2. Melis’in 3 kedi var.

3. İstanbul Türkiye’nin en büyük şehridir.

4. Mehmet’in telefonu Melih’in telefonundan eski.

5. Dün Hayri’nin erkek kardeşi gördüm.

6. James’in eşî Türk.

7. Arkadaşlarının isimleri ne?

8. O kitap bana ait.


10. Bir arkadaşım beni İtalya’ya davet etti.

11. Yüzme yumruk attı.

12. Omzunda bir papağan var.
Appendix 2

Verilen cümlelerin İngilizce karşılıklarını yazınız.

1. Karnı ağrıyor.

2. Babamın iki telefonu var.


5. Geçen hafta Sinem’in eşiyle tanıştım.

6. Thomas’ın eşi Alman.

7. Teyzelerinin isimleri ne?

8. O cüzdan bana ait.


11. Sirtından dürttü.

12. Omzunda bir kuş var.
Appendix 3

Circle the correct answer.

1. ……… is broken.
   A. One of the legs of table
   B. Table’s legs’ one
   C. One of the table’s legs
   D. One of the leg’s of table

2. ……… is very expensive.
   A. Michael’s girlfriend’s car
   B. Michael girlfriend’ car
   C. Car of Michael’s Girlfriend’s
   D. Car of Michael Girlfriend’s

3. ……… is Andy.
   A. My mother’s name
   B. My mother name
   C. Name of my mother’s
   D. My mother name’s

4. Where are ……… ?
   A. the keys of my father’s car
   B. the keys of my father car
   C. my father car’s keys
   D. my father car’ keys

5. Her sister is ……… .
   A. a friend of mine
   B. a friend’s of mine
   C. a friend’s of my
   D. is my friend’s

6. Is she ……… ?
   A. a friend of Tom’s
   B. Tom’s a friend
   C. a friend’s of Tom
   D. a Tom’s Friend’s

7. ……… are green and white.
   A. Students’ uniforms
   B. Students’s uniforms
   C. Uniforms of students’
   D. Uniforms of students’s

8. There is ……… on the table.
   A. a blue pen of mine
   B. mine blue pen
   C. a blue pen of my
   D. a my blue pen

9. That wooden house is my ……… .
   A. uncle’s house
   B. uncle’s house
   C. uncle house
   D. uncle house’s

10. ……… room is very untidy because of the party.
     A. The children’s
     B. The childrens’s
     C. The children’
     D. The childrens’

11. ……… is not safe for children.
     A. The car's front seat
     B. The front seat’s car
     C. The car front seat
     D. The seat of front car’s

12. What colour are ……… ?
     A. your sister's house’s walls
     B. the walls of your sister’s house
     C. your sister houses’ walls
     D. yours sister’ house’ walls

13. The bicycle ……… .
     A. over there is Emma’s
     B. is Emma bicycle over there
     C. over there is Emma bicycle’s
     D. over there is Emma

14. ……… are Brad and Henry.
     A. My brothers’ names
     B. My brothers’s names
     C. My brothers names
     D. My brothers’ names’s

15. Please put your books ……… .
     A. on the top of the table
     B. on table’s top
     C. on table’ top
     D. table’s top’s
Appendix 4

Circle the correct answer

1. ……….. is open.
   A. one of the windows of the room
   B. room’s windows’ one
   C. one of the room’s windows
   D. one of the windows of room

2. - …………… is very cheap
   A. Andy’s boyfriend’s notebook
   B. Andy boyfriend’s notebook
   C. Notebook of Andy’s boyfriend’s
   D. Notebook of Andy boyfriend

3. ………..is Michael.
   A. My uncle’s name
   B. My uncle name
   C. Name of my uncle’s
   D. My uncle name’s

4. Where are ………………..?
   A. the keys of my sister’s house
   B. the keys of my sister house
   C. my sister house’s keys
   D. my sister house’ keys

5. His mother is …………
   A. a colleague of mine
   B. a colleague’s of mine
   C. a colleague’s of my
   D. my colleagues’s

6. Is he ……………………?
   A. a friend of Bob’s
   B. Bob’s a friend
   C. a friend’s Bob
   D. a Bob’s friend’s

7. ……………are green and blue
   A. My T-shirts’ colors
   B. My Tshirts’s colors
   C. Colors of my T-shirts’s
   D. Colors’s of my T-shirt’s

8. There is ____________under the table
   A. a red hairclip of mine
   B. mine red hairclip
   C. a red hairclip of my
   D. a my red hairclip

9. That black car is my _____________?
   A. brother’s car
   B. brothers car
   C. brother car
   D. brother car’s

10. _________ dresses are very wet because of the rain
    A. The women’s
    B. The womens’s
    C. The women’
    D. The womens’

11- ___________ are not easy for beginners
    A. The exam’s questions
    B. The questions’s exam
    C. The question exam
    D. The questions of exam’s

12. What colour are ……… ?
    A. your friend's house’s walls
    B. the walls of your friend’s house
    C. your friend houses’ walls
    D. yours friend’ house’ walls

13. The toy …………
    A. over there is Betty’s
    B. is Betty toy over there
    C. over there is Betty toy’s
    D. over there is Betty

14. ……….. are George and Steven .
    A. My uncles’ names
    B. My uncles’s names
    C. My uncles names
    D. My uncles’ names’s

15. Please put your bag………. 
    A. on the top of the table
    B. on table’s top
    C. on table’ top
    D. table’s top’
Appendix 5

Martin and Angela are brother and sister. They share the same room. Look at the picture of their room and describe it. Write at least ten sentences.