

## External Possession in Czech: Extending Semantic Properties of the Possessor

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### 1. Notion of External Possession (EP)

Constructions “in which a semantic possessor-possessum relation is expressed by coding the possessor as a core grammatical relation of the verb and in a constituent separate from that which contains the possessum” (Payne & Barshi 1999:3). Cf. (1a).

(1) CZECH (illustration)

SUBJ		DAT	OBJ
Mother(F)-NOM.SG	<i>umyl-a</i>	<i>ditěť-i</i>	<i>vlás-y</i>
	wash:PT(PF)-F.3SG	child(N)-SG.DAT	hair(M)-PL.ACC

“Mother washed the child’s hair.” [lit. “Mother washed hair on the child”.]

b. *Mark-a*

Mother(F)-NOM.SG	<i>umyl-a</i>	<i>vlás-y</i>	<i>dítěť-e</i>
	wash:PT(PF)-F.3SG	hair(M)-PL.ACC	child(N)-SG.GEN

“Mother washed the child’s hair.” (but: the child-hair relation somehow violated)

Henceforth in examples: external possessors **bold**, possessa underlined.

Additional properties

- External possessor (EPR) is coded as a core argument, yet it is not a part of the argument frame of the verb.
- No “direct” expression of possession via possessive lexical predicates (but EPR can be combined with pronominal internal possessor (IP) coding in some languages).

Attested crosslinguistically

- In a majority of languages: EPR takes over the grammatical relation of the possessum (mainly object or subject) = “possessor raising”; PM occupies the same relation as the EPR (eg. double subject construction) or its relation is downgraded compared to the IP construction in the same language: PM is demoted (e.g. prepositional phrase), incorporated or marked applicatively on the verb; Haspelmath 1999:119).
- × In Europe: three world major types of EP attested, yet marginally; instead, EP is marked by the dative. Dative EPR is specific and it is a feature of European linguistic area (Haspelmath 1999).
- Topic of this talk: some of the proposed restrictions on European dative possessors seem to be (at least partially) violated in Czech. > Examination of the data, proposing explanations.

### 2. Study of possessive relations in Czech

Way of investigation

- Czech – a thoroughly described language. Why to deal with Czech?
- Hypothesis: Czech grammar is full of peculiarities which tend to be omitted by grammarians.
- The most striking – neither the prototypes nor clear classes, but their boundaries and border instances > study of the limits of intra-language variation > focus: the domain of possession.

- In-depth analysis has two aspects:
  - description of intra-language categories (can build upon former Prague structuralists investigations; above all Pitha 1992), examination of their limits and semantic classifications.
  - examination of comparative concepts and their limits in Czech (these concepts can even help redefine unsatisfactory semantic classifications); Czech from comparative perspective.

**Starting point: external possession**

- comparative concept, peculiar way of expressing possessive relations itself;
- fascinating syntactic and semantic properties; uncertain category: Czech dative of possession

### 3. European prototype (SAE)

- two most important characteristics:
  - the marking of the EPR by the dative case, and
  - the strict affectedness condition, i.e., external possessors are only possible if the possessor is thought of as being mentally affected by the described situation (Haspelmath 1999: 111)

#### 3.1 Requirements for languages of European linguistic area according to Haspelmath (1999)

**crosslinguistic hierarchies:** Haspelmath (1999), based on König & Haspelmath (1997), slightly different version in König (2001), frames are mine, restrictions based on Haspelmath (1999)

- Possessors** in EP constructions are animate  
 1/2 personal pronoun > 3 p. pronoun > proper name > other animate > inanimate  
 (The Animacy Hierarchy)

- Predicates** – denoting an event, not stative verbs

patient affecting > dynamic non-affecting > stative

(The Situation Hierarchy)

- Possessa** – in some languages (French, Dutch) – restriction to a body part term

body part > garment > other contextually unique item

(The Inalienability Hierarchy)

- In European languages, the **syntactic relation of the possessum** is generally a PP / direct object / unaccusative object; unergative subjects are very rare (Albanian); transitive subjects not attested

PP > direct object > unaccusative subject > unergative subject > transitive subject

(The Syntactic Relation Hierarchy)

**Summary – unattested cases of EPR in European languages seem to be:**

- inanimate possessors,
- stative predicates,
- possessa in transitive subject positions (+ unergative subjects very rare)

#### 4. Czech prototype

##### 4.1 Prototypical properties of external possessor

*syntactic:* dative

*semantic:*

- reference to a human animate person,
- overtly expressed as a personal pronoun.

*pragmatic:*

- position of EPR is free with respect to information structure, but:
- in a majority of instances EPR seems to be a topic > prototypical representation by a clitic personal pronoun; the focus position is not excluded, but appears to be rare

(2) CZECH (SYN2005; tabloid *Blesk*, 2004)

PRED [SUBJ]	DAT	OBJ			
<i>Zkroutil</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>ruk-u</i>	<i>a</i>		
twist:PST(PF)[M.3SG]	3SG.M.DAT	arm(F)-SG.ACC	and		
PRED	DAT	OBJ			
<i>zranil</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>loket</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>předloketě</i>	
injure:PST(PF)[M.3SG]	3SG.M.DAT	elbow(M)[SG.ACC]	and	forearm(N)-SG.ACC	

“He twisted his arm and injured his elbow and forearm.”

(3) CZECH (SYN2005; tabloid *Blesk*, 2004)

V	t-u	chvil-i	se	mu	na	čel-e
In	DEM-F.SG.LOC	moment(F)-SG.LOC	REFL	3SG.M.DAT	on	forehead(N)-SG.LOC
PRED		SUBJ				
<i>rozpleskl-a</i>	<i>sněhov-á</i>	<i>koule</i>				
smash:PST(PF)-F.3SG	snow-F.SG.NOM	ball(F).SG.NOM				

“In this moment a snowball smashed on his forehead.”

##### 4.2 Prototypical properties of the possessor

*syntactic:*

- PP / object / subject – no special preference, but
- typical correlations of syntactic relations with the predicate type (cf. § 4.3),
- (ii) if competition between two possible PMs in one construction: the decisive point is semantics, see (4) and (5) (N.B. unergative predicates)

*semantic:*

- body-part relation, i.e. if related to the prototypical external possessor; otherwise part-whole relation

(4) CZECH (SYN2006PUB; daily *MF Dnes*, 2004)

[...žena, které je nepřijemné,]					
DAT	PP				
<i>že</i>	<i>po</i>	<i>zahrad-ě</i>	<i>běhal</i>	<i>soused-ův</i>	<i>pes</i> [...]
that	3SG.F.DAT	round	garden(F)-LOC.SG	run:PST(PF)[M.3SG]	neighbour-POSS(M)[M.SG.NOM]
					dog(M)[SG.NOM]

“[...a woman who finds annoying] that the neighbour’s dog was running round her garden.”

(5) CZECH (Internet; film rating [www.csfd.cz/film/234142-po-precetni-spalte/](http://www.csfd.cz/film/234142-po-precetni-spalte/))

SUBJ	DAT	PRED	PP		
<i>děti</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>běha-jí</i>	<i>po</i>	<i>zahrad-ě</i>	[ <i>a já nevím, který je který</i> ]
children(F)-PL.NOM	1SG.DAT	run:PRS(IPF)-3PL	round	garden(F)-LOC.SG	

“My children are running round the garden [and I don’t know who is who]”

##### 4.3 Prototypical properties of the predicate

*syntactic:* transitive / intransitive valency

- correlations between PM and predicate type:
  - PM is object > transitive (2),
  - PM is PP > both transitive (6) and intransitive (3) possible,
  - PM is subject > intransitive (7).

(6) CZECH (SYN2005; novel, 2002)

PRED	DAT	OBJ	PP		
<i>Položil-a</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>ruk-u</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>hlav-u</i>	
lay:PST(PF)-F.3SG	3SG.M.DAT	hand(F)-SG.ACC	on	head(F)-SG.ACC	

“She laid her hand on his head.” [her hand – implicit possession]

(7) CZECH (SYN2005; novel, 1987)

DAT	PRED	SUBJ			
<i>Ev-ě</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>třes-ou</i>	<i>ruk-ě</i> .		
Eva(F)-SG.DAT	REFL	tremble:PRS(IPF)-3PL	hand(F)-PL.NOM		

“Eva’s hands are trembling.”

*semantic*

- dynamic, active; inherent semantics of the predicate is patient-affecting
- broad area of predicates which are somehow changing the quality of possession: *break, injure ... repair, improve ... steal, grab ...*
- however, the predicate itself need not be affective, it should bear a potential context-dependent affective interpretation, i.e. semantics of the construction should be affective > >

##### 4.4 Overall feature of the Czech prototypical EP construction

The predicate have an effect on the possessum and thereby the possessor is perceived (by the speaker) as being mentally affected.

##### 5. Moving off the prototype – the data

###### Possessors in EP constructions:

- NOT animate
- affected, but not mentally

### Animate > semi-animate EPRs

EPR is a non-humanlike animal (part-whole):

- (8) CZECH (SYN2005; magazine *Reflex*, magazine, 10/2004):  
 Vždyt usekn-ete -li COND earthworm(F)-SG.DAT tail(M)[SG.ACC] AUX.MOD-F.3SG AUX.COND die  
 Well cut.off:PRS(PF)-2pl. SUBJ žítal-e měl-a by umřít,  
 ale neumř-e, tělo jí dorost-e! DAT PREP OBJ  
 but not.die:PRS(PF)-3SG body(N)-SG.NOM 3SG.F.DAT grow.up:PRS(PF)-3SG  
 “Well, if you cut off a tail of an earthworm, it should die, but it doesn’t, its body grows up!”

EPR is a plant (part-whole):

- (9) Czech (Internet; discussion on houseplants <http://jiho.moravskestavby.cz/?poradna/?dpo=6>)  
 BALSAMÍN-E opadáva-jí popu-ata SUBJ DAT  
 Garden.balsam(F)-SG.DAT fall.off:PRS(PF)-3PL bud(N)-PL.NOM  
 “Buds of the garden balsam fall off.”

### Non-animate human-like EPRs

EPR is a statue (part-whole):

- (10) Czech (SYN2006PUB; daily *MF Dnes*, 1996)  
 Pachatel-é někdy urazí soš-e SUBJ PREP OBJ DAT  
 offender(M)-PL.NOM sometimes cut.off:PRS(PF)-3pl. statue(F)-SG.DAT  
prst-y, tluč-e nebo i hlav-u OBJ OBJ  
 finger(M)-PL.ACC hand(F)-PL.ACC or even head(F)-SG.ACC  
 “Offenders sometimes cut off fingers, hands or even a head of a statue.” [according to police statistics]

### Non-animate non-human EPRs:

EPR is a car (part-whole):

- (11) CZECH (SYN2005, tabloid *Blesk*, 2000)  
 Proti globalizac-i protestoval tak, že OBJ OBJ  
 against globalization(F)-SG.DAT protest:PT(PF)[M.3SG] so that  
 DAT PREP [SUBJ] PREP [SUBJ]  
volvu s německ-ou SPZ ukroutil žadn-í OBJ OBJ  
 Volvo(N)-SG.DAT with German-F.SG.INS licence.Nr(F) wring-off:PT(PF)[M.3SG] rear-M.SG.ACC  
stěrač a Ford-u Mondeo s pražsk-ou SPZ OBJ OBJ  
 windshield-wiper(M)[SG.ACC] and Ford(M)-SG.DAT Mondeo with Prague-F.SG.INS licence.Nr(F)  
 PREP OBJ PREP  
rozbil okno a ulomil OBJ OBJ  
 break:PT(PF)[M.3SG] windshield(N)-SG.ACC and break.off:PT(PF)[M.3SG] as well  
 OBJ OBJ  
zadní stěrač. OBJ OBJ  
 rear-M.SG.ACC windshield-wiper(M)[SG.ACC]  
 “His anti-globalization protests consisted of wringing off the rear windshield wiper of a Volvo with German licence number and shattering the window and breaking off the rear wiper of a Ford Mondeo with Prague licence number.”

EPR is a phone (part-whole):

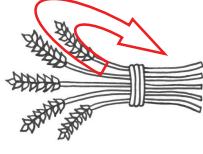
- (12) CZECH (Internet, auction bid, [www.aukro.cz](http://www.aukro.cz))  
Mobil-u nesvítí displej SUBJ PREP OBJ  
 Cell.phone(M)-SG.DAT not.shine:PRS(PF)[3SG] display(M)[SG.NOM]  
 “Phone display is not working.”

EPR is a house (part-whole):

- (13) CZECH (SYN2006PUB, daily *MF Dnes*, 2003)  
 [Vlastní dům, který jsi zvelebil]  
 PREP [SUBJ] DAT PREP  
 a opravil mu střech-u ? OBJ DAT  
 and repair:PT(PF)[M.3SG] 3SG.M.DAT roof(F)-SG.ACC  
 “[Do you own a house which you have improved] and whose roof you have repaired?”

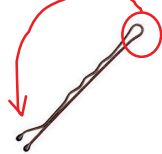
EPR is a sheaf of wheat (part-whole):

- (14) Czech (SYN2005, novel F. Dvořák, *Jak hromady pobíých ptáků*, 1998)  
 [To bylo hemžení, když tatínek postavil první snopek]  
 PREP [SUBJ] DAT OBJ OBJ  
 a ohnul mu klásk-y! OBJ OBJ  
 and bend:PT(PF)[M.3SG] 3SG.M.DAT spikelet(M)-PL.ACC  
 “[Children] were swarming after daddy had put up the first little sheaf] and bended its spikelets!”



EPR is a hair grip (part-whole):

- (15) Czech (SYN2006PUB, daily *Právo*, 2004)  
 [Náš vížešiška Helenka mi dala sponku do vlasů. Sundala ji.]  
 PREP [SUBJ] DAT OBJ OBJ  
 ohnul-a ji konec OBJ OBJ  
 flex:PT-F.3SG 3SG.F.DAT end(M)[SG.ACC]  
 [a dala mi ji do náramku.]  
 “[Our make-up artist Helenka gave me a hair grip. She took it down,] flexed its end [and turned it into a bracelet for me.]”



### Non-animate human-founded EPRs:

EPR is an organization (association, sports club, company)

- (16) CZECH (SYN2006PUB, daily *MF Dnes*, 2003)  
 [Spolek chce.]  
 SUBJ PREP OBJ DAT  
 aby měšf-o opravil-o muze-u budov-u OBJ OBJ  
 so.as[COND] town(N)-SG.NOM repair:PT-3SG.N museum(N)-SG.DAT building(F)-SG.ACC  
 “[The association wants] the council to reconstruct the building of the museum.”  
 [museum = institution]

(17) CZECH (SYN2006PUB, daily *MF Dnes*, 1999)

- Spart-ě se zranil obránc-e Šrek.  
 DAT PREP SUBJ  
 Sparta(F)-SG.DAT REFL injure:PT(PF)[M.3SG] defender(M)-SG.NOM Šrek(M)[SG.NOM]  
 “Sparta’s defender Šrek has been injured.” [Sparta = an ice-hockey team]

(18) CZECH (Internet economic daily *ihned.cz*, 2010)

DATE	PRED	SUBJ	
Microsoft-u	vzrostl	zisk	o 60 %
Microsoft(M)-SG.DAT	grow:PST(PF)[M.3SG]	profit(W)-SG.NOM	about 60 %.

“Microsoft profit rises 60 %.”

## 6. Summary: ways of semantic extension of EPR

### inanimacy of the EPR

- no strict prohibition of inanimate EPRs;
- two classes of inanimate EPRs; language specific scales of semantic extension:
  - I. animals and inanimates which resemble humans in some respect – **metaphorical anthropomorphic character** + they pertain to the area of human interest
    - A – functional resemblance, i.e. *human life* > *object functioning* extension:
      - animals > plants > cars, phones and other machines of human interest
    - B – formal resemblance, i.e. *body-part* > *part-whole* extension:
      - statues of humans > other objects of human interest (incl. all A-class possessors)
  - II. institutionalized group of people – **metonymical character**
    - A – *human possessor* > *group-of-humans possessor* extension

### affectedness

- not restricted to mental affectedness of EPR;
- in terms of § 4.4 mental affectedness is not required, affectedness of the possessor pertains to the speaker’s view of reality; it does not depend on real mental or physical state of EPR, but rather on the discourse context reflected by the speaker (cf. Fried 2009) > > >

## 7. Explanation of the semantic extension of EPR: Usage of the external possessive construction in Czech relies on the existence of the affectedness discourse context which is perceived and reflected by the speaker.

- Czech EP constructions seem to be very free with respect to restrictions generalized in crosslinguistic hierarchies (above), however, following correspondencies can be traced:
  - The higher the occupied position on each hierarchy, the higher the probability that the affectedness context occurs.
    - For body-part relations – the affectedness context = high frequent context. Internal possessive relations possible, in some cases obligatory (e.g. body parts as transitive agents like “Her hair excited him.” Fried 2009:218), but uncommon.
    - For inanimates – the affectedness context = low frequent context. Affectedness contexts possible only for specific classes of inanimates.

## 8. Crosslinguistic and areal consideration

- Is Czech an exception? Probably not. Other areally and genetically related languages, especially Slovak and Polish, might attest similar ways of extension.
  - The topic seems to be too epiphenomenal to be properly examined in descriptions of individual languages and comparative studies (e.g. Sarić 2002, or for Hungarian Nikolaeva 2001); since introspection often misleads, need for in-depth corpus research.

- Inanimate EPRs in German?

- *Der Baum trägt so viele Zwetschken, dass ihm die Äste brechen.*  
“There are so many plums on the tree that its branches are breaking off.”
- *Meinem Audi stirbt der Motor beim losfahren ab.*  
“The Motor of my Audi dies when driving away.”

## 9. Conclusions

- The data on the Czech external possessor give evidence for extension of the proposed semantic limits of the European dative possessor.
- Usage of the dative EPR in Czech is best explained in terms of affectedness and of the whole discourse context perceived and reflected by the speaker.
- Corresponding phenomena in neighbouring (and other) languages waiting for further research.

### List of abbreviations

SUBJ	subject	(PF)	perfective verb	AUX	auxiliary
OBJ	object	(PP)	imperfective verb	MOD	modal
PRED	predicate	NOM	nominative	POSS	possessive
PP	prepositional phrase	GEN	genitive	REFL	reflexive
M	masculine	DAT	dative	COND	conditional
F	feminine	ACC	accusative	DEM	demonstrative
N	neuter	LOC	locative		
:PST	past stem of the verb	INS	instrumental		
:PRS	present stem of the verb	SG	singular	<b>bold</b>	external possessor
	the verb	PL	plural	<u>underlined</u>	possessum

### Data

SYN2000, SYN2005, SYN2006PUB. Corpora of written Czech. Praha: Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK.  
WWW: <http://ucnk.ff.cuni.cz>.

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