

# The order of genitive and accusative clitics in Czech and Slovenian

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# Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Background
- 3 Methods
- 4 Results
- 5 Discussion

# Introduction

Czech and Slovenian pronominal clitics typically (see Stegovec, 2020; Sturgeon et al., 2011) follow set REFL-DAT-ACC order (cf. Franks & King, 2000, pp. 45, 105):

- (1) a. Ne-odvážila jsem **se jí ho** dát.  
NEG-dared PST.ISG REFL.ACC her.DAT it.ACC give.INF  
'I didn't dare give it to her.'  
(Czech: cf. Veselovská, 1995, p. 273)
- b. Drznil **si ji ga** je hvaliti.  
dared REFL.DAT her.DAT him.ACC PST.3SG praise.INF  
'He dared praise him to her.'  
(Slovenian: Golden & Milojević Sheppard, 2000, p. 194)

# Genitive clitics

Genitive clitics are much rarer and follow datives:

- (2) a. Můj život má právě tolik smyslu, kolik  
my life has just as.much meaning.GEN how.much  
**mu ho** dám.  
it.DAT it.GEN give.ISG  
'My life has just as much meaning as I give it.' (Czech)
- b. Koliko **mu ga** je še ostalo, ostaja  
how.much him.DAT it.GEN PST.3SG still remained remains  
neznanka.  
unknown  
'How much of it still remained for him remains unknown.'  
(Slovenian)

# Genitive and accusative clitics

Sentences with genitive and accusative clitics are rare, accounts vary

Czech

- **Veselovská (1995), Toman (1999)**: GEN-ACC order standard
- **Lenertová (2004)**: ACC-GEN order required
- **Franks and King (2000), Hana (2007)**: preferences vary, judgements strained, combination perhaps ungrammatical

Slovenian

- **Franks and King (2000), Golden and Milojević Sheppard (2000)**: ACC-GEN order required

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Issues:

- Based on small numbers of sentences/judgements
- Often fail to account for important syntactic factors

I present a corpus study of sentences with GEN and ACC clitics in Czech and Slovenian:

- Both orders occur in both languages: grammatical to at least some speakers (though rare)! (contra Franks & King, 2000)
- Order heavily dependent on syntactic factors: merged order/construction type, person, maybe case
- No real difference in language (though the person effect may be stronger in Slovenian)

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- Slovenian claimed to have looser case order of clitics (Stegovec, 2020)
- **Genitive-accusative syncretism** more complete in Slovenian

		Czech	
		SG	PL
1		<b>mě</b>	<b>nás</b>
2		<b>tě</b>	<b>vás</b>
3	M/N	<b>ho</b>	jich
	F	jí   ji	je
		G A	G A

		Slovenian			
		SG	DU	PL	
1		<b>me</b>	<b>naju</b>	<b>nas</b>	
2		<b>te</b>	<b>vaju</b>	<b>vas</b>	
3	M/N	<b>ho</b>	ju	jih	
	F	je   jo			
		G A	G A	G A	

(cf. Franks & King, 2000, pp. 36, 98; Lenertová, 2004, p. 152)

Czech 3SG.F syncretic for some (Hana, 2007), usually distinct in writing

# Construction 1: Genitive quantity subject extraction

Numbers  $\geq 5$  and other quantifiers take *genitive* complements, which can extract and cliticize alongside a direct object:

- (3) a. V roce 200I **jich** **ho** získala asi tisícovka  
in year 200I them.GEN it.ACC obtained about thousand  
'In 200I about a thousand of them got it' (Czech)
- b. Doslej **jih** **ga** je dobilo samo 22  
so far them.GEN it.ACC PST.3SG received only 22  
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Merged order: GEN > ACC (sort of)

# Construction 1: Genitive quantity subject extraction

The direct object can also originate from an *embedded clause*:

- (4) a. ‘But even today I’ll go somewhere with friends, ...’  
když **mě** **jich** tolik přijelo [uvítat]  
that me.ACC them.GEN so many came welcome.INF  
‘when so many of them came to welcome me’ (Czech)
- b. ‘I’m happy that so many people support me and ...’  
da **me** **jih** je tolik prišlo [pričakat] na ta mraz  
that me.ACC them.GEN PST.3SG so many came wait.INF in this cold  
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'that **so many of them** came into this cold to await **me**.' (Slovenian)

This should lead to a categorical preference for merged (GEN-ACC) order (cf. Hana, 2007; Lenertová, 2004; Rezac, 2005; Rosen, 2001; Tabachnick, 2024), but we see counterexamples!

## Construction 2: Accusative–genitive ditransitives

A few verbs (and, in Slovenian, non-verbal predicates) take ACC patient and GEN theme:

(5) a. ‘FEAR OF SNAKES?’

Padesátikilová kobra tygrovaná **vás** **ho** zbaví.  
fifty-kilo cobra tigered you.ACC it.GEN rid

‘The fifty-kilo tiger cobra will rid you of it.’ (Czech)

b. ‘Have you thought yet about the period after your career ends ...’

ali **vas** **ga** je strah?  
or you.ACC it.GEN is state of fear

‘or are you afraid of it? (Slovenian)

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Merged order: ACC > GEN (cf. Dvořák, 2010; Franks & King, 2000, p. 109)

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## Czech

- SYNVI I corpus from the Czech National Corpus (Křen et al., 2022)
- Only texts marked as written in Czech (no translations)
- ~5.9 billion words, mostly journalistic texts from 2004–21

## Slovenian

- Gigafida 2.0 corpus of standard written Slovenian (Krek et al., 2020)
- ~1.1 billion words, mixed genre, mostly from 1999–2018

## Finding tokens

- String- and lemma-based search to exclude copula *je* (=3PL.ACC/3SG.F.GEN), then manual filtering
- 721 Czech tokens, 190 Slovenian tokens
- Also removed: 20 tokens with ambiguously embedded clitics or rare constructions

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Order varies by construction

<i>construction</i>	<i>order</i>		
	<i>GA</i>	<i>AG</i>	<i>% AG</i>
ditransitive	5	239	98.0%
quantity	251	410	62.0%

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- Quantity subjects show a more mixed pattern

# Person and embedding

Quantity subjects show a more complicated pattern

<i>person</i>		<i>order</i>		
GEN	ACC	GA	AG	% AG
3	1/2	42	396	90.4%
1/2	3	45	2	4.3%
3	3	164	12	6.8%

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GEN	ACC	GA	AG	% AG	GA	AG	% AG
3	1/2	36	380	<b>91.3%</b>	6	16	<b>72.7%</b>
1/2	3	44	2	4.3%	1	0	0.0%
3	3	156	12	7.1%	8	0	0.0%
				<i>no embedding</i>	<i>embedding</i>		

- Strong preference for non-third-person to come first
- When person doesn't matter (both third-person), GEN-ACC (merged) order dominant
- When ACC is the object of the embedded clause, it's significantly – but not categorically – less likely to cross over GEN

## Small differences between Czech and Slovenian

<i>construction</i>	<i>person</i>		<i>order</i>			<i>order</i>		
	GEN	ACC	GA	AG	% AG	GA	AG	% AG
ditransitive	all		4	208	98.1%	1	31	96.9%
quantity	3	1/2	41	341	89.3%	1	55	98.2%
quantity	1/2	3	21	2	8.7%	24	0	0.0%
quantity	3	3	90	8	8.2%	74	4	5.1%
			<i>Czech</i>			<i>Slovenian</i>		

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- No main effect of language
- The person effect trends stronger in Slovenian – more data needed

# Flipped case

Few forms differentiate the cases:

<i>language</i>	<i>pronoun</i>	GEN	ACC
Czech	3PL	jich	je
Czech	3SG.F	jí	ji
Slovenian	3SG.F	je	jo

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Among these, some examples appear with the *wrong* case:

- (6) a. 'They always come to the operation with great fear. ...'

Na vás je, abyste **jich** **ho** zbavili.  
on YOU.PL is COND.2PL them.ACC! it.GEN rid.INF

'It's your job to rid them of it.'

(Czech)

- b. 'The new path which lies before you ...'

in **vas** **jo** bo sprva strah  
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'and of which you will at first be afraid'

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# Flipped case

Such cases are rare ...

<i>language</i>	<i>pronoun</i>	<i>expected</i>	<i>actual</i>	<i>count</i>
Czech	3PL	je	jich	2
Czech	3SG.F	ji	jí	5
Czech	3SG.F	jí	ji	1
Slovenian	3SG.F	je	jo	1

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Czech	3SG.F	ji	jí	5
Czech	3SG.F	jí	ji	1
Slovenian	3SG.F	je	jo	1

...but systematic

- All with ditransitives
- All with ACC-GEN argument order (AG→GG or AG→AA)
- That is, avoidance of ACC unambiguously preceding GEN

Results show the interplay of several *competing pressures*

- **Construction:** preference for merged order
  - quantity: moderate preference for GEN > ACC made stronger when ACC is embedded
  - ditransitive: strong preference for ACC > GEN with occasional “wrong” case in non-syncretic forms
- **Person:** strong preference for 1, 2 > 3 (Person Case Constraint)
- **Language:** no significant differences, though the person effect may be stronger in Slovenian

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- Clitic order is not categorical, but involves balancing competing pressures: merged order, person, even case assignment
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- If the person effect is stronger in Slovenian than Czech, this would match reports of more freedom of DAT/ACC order in Slovenian (Stegovec, 2020)
- Experimental testing (i.e. judgement tests) could tease these factors apart!

# Theoretical consequences

View of clitic order as subject to *competing pressures* leading to *variation*

- most studies of (Slavic) clitic combinations deal with categorical grammaticality
- need more large-scale corpus and experimental studies (e.g. Kolaković et al., 2022)



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If these pressures include a case-based preference for GEN-ACC order, this must be *grammatical*

- DAT-GEN-ACC order aligns with the *case containment* hierarchy independently proposed to account for morphological syncretism (Caha, 2009)
- Proposal (cf. Tabachnick, 2024): case-based template enforced by clitic probe that attracts clitics in this case order

# Acknowledgements

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