

The order of genitive and accusative clitics in Czech

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 Clitics and other pronouns
- 3 Construction 1: Genitive subject extraction
- 4 Construction 2: Accusative–genitive ditransitives
- 5 Discussion

Introduction

Czech pronominal “second-position” clitics follow set order:

REFL–DAT–ACC (cf. Franks & King, 2000, p. 105):

- (1) Já jsem **se** **mu** **ho** ne-odvážila dát.
I PST.ISG REFL.ACC him.DAT it.ACC NEG-dared give.INF
‘I didn’t dare to give it to him.’ (cf. Veselovská, 1995, p. 273)

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‘I didn’t dare to give it to him.’ (cf. Veselovská, 1995, p. 273)

Genitive clitics are much rarer and follow datives:

- (2) Můj život má právě tolik **smyslu**, **kolik** **mu**
my life has just as.much meaning.GEN how.much it.DAT
ho dám.
it.GEN give.ISG
‘My life has just as much meaning as I give it.’ (SYNVII)

Genitive and accusative clitics

Sentences with both genitive and accusative clitics are rare, their order is disputed

- **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

Similar reports for South Slavic languages! (Browne, 2004; Franks & King, 2000)

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Similar reports for South Slavic languages! (Browne, 2004; Franks & King, 2000)

Issues with previous claims:

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

Overview

I present corpus studies of two constructions with GEN and ACC clitics:

- Both orders occur: grammatical to at least some speakers (though rare)! (contra Franks & King, 2000)
- Order heavily dependent on syntactic factors: merged order and person
- Sporadic GEN-ACC order with cases *flipped* (the argument expected to have ACC instead has GEN)

Overview

I present corpus studies of two constructions with GEN and ACC clitics:

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- Order heavily dependent on syntactic factors: merged order and person
- Sporadic GEN-ACC order with cases *flipped* (the argument expected to have ACC instead has GEN)

Conclusion:

- Suggestive of some *grammatical* pressure preferring GEN-ACC order, like DAT-ACC preference but weaker (cf. Tabachnick, 2024; Toman, 1999)

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Genitive and accusative pronouns

| | 1SG | | 2SG | | 3SG.M/N | |
|---------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| | <i>clitic</i> | <i>full</i> | <i>clitic</i> | <i>full</i> | <i>clitic</i> | <i>full</i> |
| GEN/ACC | mě | (mne) | tě | tebe | ho | jeho/(jej) |
| | 3SG.F | | IPL | 2PL | 3PL | |
| | <i>clitic/full</i> | | <i>clitic/full</i> | <i>clitic/full</i> | <i>clitic/full</i> | |
| GEN | jí | | nás | vás | jich | |
| ACC | ji | | | | je | |

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

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Widespread genitive-accusative syncretism

- 3SG.F distinction neutralized for some, usually to *jí* (Hana, 2007, p. 78), though generally retained in writing

- Syncretic clitics glossed from context: *ho* = him.GEN or him.ACC

- Non-syncretic clitics glossed with underline: *jich* = them.GEN

Genitive and accusative pronouns

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Widespread clitic–full pronoun syncretism

- Possibility: full pronoun “masquerading” as clitic at end of cluster (see Franks & King, 2000, p. 108)
- Full pronouns are usually focused and in different positions
- Doesn't seem to be a major factor in my studies

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Background

Numbers ≥ 5 and other quantifiers take *genitive* complements, which can extract and cliticize:

- (3) Petr **jich** našel tehdy pět.
Petr.NOM them.GEN found.M.SG then five
'Petr found five of them at that time.' (Toman, 1986, p. 131)

When extracted from the subject, this clitic can cooccur with a direct object clitic:

- (4) Navštívilo **jich** **ho** jen pár.
visited.N.SG them.GEN him.ACC only couple
'Just a couple of them visited him.' (Toman, 1999, p. 205)

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Previous reports

- **Toman (1999, p. 205)**: Prefers GEN-ACC order, but judgements “perhaps” not “relatively stable”
- **Franks and King (2000, p. 108)**: Both orders marked %, three speakers varied (“both orders pretty bad”, AG “only possible order”, GA “relatively OK”)
- **Hana (2007, p. 113)**: Both orders found in corpus, “The judgements are largely speaker dependent, some speakers judging both orders as incorrect or marginal.”

- SYNvII corpus from the Czech National corpus (Křen et al., 2022)
- Heavily weighted towards journalistic texts
- Only texts marked as written in Czech (no translations)
- Size: ~5.9 billion words

- Sequences of two genitive or accusative clitics
- Some clitics excluded for giving too many false positives
 - *mě, jí, je*
- Crucial: included 3PL.GEN *jich*, by far the most common subject complement

- Initial search: 1198 sentences
- Manually coded
- 330 target sentences with GEN quantity complement and ACC direct object clitics

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- Manually coded
- 330 target sentences with GEN quantity complement and ACC direct object clitics
- By comparison: 15,183 hits for sequence *mu ho* (him/it.DAT him/it.ACC)

Basic results

Both orders are well-attested ...

| <i>order</i> | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>GA</i> | <i>AG</i> | <i>% GA</i> |
| 145 | 185 | 43.9% |

Basic results

Both orders are well-attested ... but largely vary by person!

| <i>person</i> | | <i>order</i> | | |
|---------------|-----|--------------|-----|-------|
| GEN | ACC | GA | AG | % GA |
| 3 | 1/2 | 37 | 175 | 17.5% |
| 1/2 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 92.9% |
| 3 | 3 | 88 | 8 | 91.7% |
| total | | 145 | 185 | 43.9% |

- When both clitics are 3, strong preference for GEN-ACC order
- Strong preference for 1/2 clitics to precede 3 – as known from DAT/ACC combinations cross-linguistically (e.g. Béjar & Rezac, 2003) and in Czech (Sturgeon et al., 2011) (Person Case Constraint)

Third-person only

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- (5) 'He has several operations behind him and ...'

spousta **jich** **ho** ještě čeká.

lots them.GEN him.ACC still wait

'many more of them await him.'

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- (6) 'He only trusted a couple of doctors ...'

i když **ho** **jich** prohlížela celá řada.

even when him.ACC them.GEN examined whole row

'even though a whole series of them examined him.'

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However, this construction doesn't appear in other positions – non-clitic reading likely unacceptable.

Asymmetrical person

Strong preference for 1/2 clitics to precede 3

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Both of the ACC 3-GEN 1/2 sentences have adjacent quantifiers

- (7) ... jakmile **ho** [nás pět] nahraje, už je to Limetal.
as soon as it.ACC us.GEN five play already is it Limetal
'... as soon as the five of us play it, it's Limetal.'

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Unlike before, these may not be clitics, since the construction occurs elsewhere:

- (8) [Nás sedm] pak v květnu letělo na Bali
us.GEN seven then in May flew.N.SG to Bali
'The seven of us then flew to Bali in May.'

(SYNVIT)

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(SYNVIT)

Summary

Attested tokens show variable resolution of two often competing pressures:

- GEN extracted from subject $>$ ACC object: usually (but not always) observed
- I/2 $>$ 3: usually (but not always) triumphs over the case/argument order

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Background

A few verbs, most commonly *zbavit* ‘rid’, take ACC patient and GEN theme:

- (9) Zbavili Alenu občanství.
rid.M.PL Alena.ACC citizenship.GEN

‘They stripped Alena of her citizenship.’

(Franks & King, 2000, p. 108)

- (9) shows the default merged order of arguments ACC > GEN (Franks & King, 2000, p. 109; cf. Dvořák, 2010)

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Both arguments can cliticize (at least for some speakers):

- (10) Nakonec **ji** **ho** zbavili.
finally her.ACC him.GEN rid.M.PL
‘They finally rid her of him.’ (Lenertová, 2004, p. 154)

- **Lenertová (2004, p. 154)**: ACC-GEN usually required, with one exception
- **Franks and King (2000, pp. 108–9)**: speakers preferred ACC-GEN “to the limited extent that they could provide judgments at all”, “very strained”, “suggests that simultaneous realization of both accusative and genitive clitics is simply not grammatical”

Search parameters

- Sequences of two genitive or accusative clitics
- With a form of *zbavit* (PERF) or *zbavovat* (IMPF) ‘rid’ ≤ 4 words away
- Filtered out more common reflexivized and passive forms

- Initial search: 322 sentences
- Manually coded
- 197 target sentences with both arguments of *zbavit* cliticized

Are speakers avoiding GEN+ACC clitic combinations?

If so, both arguments of *zbavit* should cliticize less often than other ditransitives.

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| <i>merged order</i> | <i>verb</i> | | <i>total</i> | <i>both clitics</i> | <i>% both clitics</i> |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ACC-GEN | zbavit | 'rid' | 111 063 | 322 | 0.29% |
| ACC-DAT | svěřit | 'entrust' | 78 898 | 913 | 1.16% |
| | podřídít | 'subordinate' | 13 219 | 23 | 0.17% |
| DAT-ACC | poskytnout | 'provide' | 768 027 | 2661 | 0.35% |
| | darovat | 'gift' | 112 153 | 1253 | 1.12% |

includes false positives, ditransitive types from Dvořák (2010)

Depends on the verb – rates for *zbavit* are within the range of others, no clear evidence for avoidance

Basic results

Overwhelming majority: 1/2 patient (ACC) and 3 theme (GEN)

| <i>person</i> | | <i>order</i> | |
|---------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| GEN | ACC | GA | AG |
| 3 | 1/2 | 1 | 160 |

- Strong preferences for 1/2-3 and patient-theme

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| <i>person</i> | | <i>order</i> | | |
|---------------|-----|--------------|-----|-------------------|
| GEN | ACC | GA | AG | <i>flipped</i> GA |
| 3 | 1/2 | 1 | 160 | 1 |
| 1/2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 3 | 3 | 2 | 26 | 6 |

- Strong preferences for 1/2-3 and patient-theme
- When both clitics are 3, strong preference for patient-theme order, with *both* case orders:
 - canonical: ACC patient, GEN theme
 - flipped: GEN patient, ACC theme

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(11) ‘Your loved ones will be under tension, ...’

zbavte **je** **ho.**
rid.IMP.2PL them.ACC it.GEN

‘relieve them of it.’

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(11) ‘Your loved ones will be under tension, ...’

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‘relieve them of it.’

(12) ‘They gave an ex-mayor a position for mayors. ...’

Museli **jí** **ho** zbavit.
had.PL it.GEN him.ACC rid.INF

‘They had to strip him of it.’

Flipped case

| <i>person</i> | | <i>order</i> | | |
|---------------|-----|--------------|----|-------------------|
| GEN | ACC | GA | AG | <i>flipped</i> GA |
| 3 | 3 | 2 | 26 | 6 |

Recall: most clitics are syncretic in GEN and ACC, except:

- 3SG.F: GEN *jí*, ACC *ji*
- 3PL: GEN *jich*, ACC *je*

These clitics sometimes appear with the “wrong” case:

- (I3) ‘... her face is adorned by a real pig’s snout. ...’
Zbavit **jí** (**ji**) **ho** může jen opravdová láska.
rid.INF her.GEN! it.ACC! can only true love

‘Only true love can rid her of it.’

- (I4) ‘They always come to the operation with great fear. ...’
Na vás je, abyste **jich** (**je**) **ho** zbavili.
on YOU.PL is COND.2PL them.GEN! it.ACC! rid.INF

‘It’s your job to rid them of it.’

Are these examples really meaningful? Objections:

- Maybe this is neutralization of 3SG.F *ji* (ACC) and *jí* (GEN) (cf. Hana, 2007, p. 78)
- A large corpus always has some typos, copyediting errors, etc.

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 - Greater use of *jí* for canonical ACC than expected

| <i>canonical case</i> | <i>clitic</i> | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| | <i>ji</i> | <i>jí</i> |
| accusative (<i>ji</i>) | 1 | 5 |
| genitive (<i>jí</i>) | I | 57 |

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Flipped case

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- Maybe this is neutralization of 3SG.F *ji* (ACC) and *jí* (GEN) (cf. Hana, 2007, p. 78)
 - Greater use of *jí* for canonical ACC than expected
 - Also occurs with 3PL *je* (ACC) → *jich* (GEN)

| <i>canonical case</i> | <i>clitic</i> | | <i>clitic</i> | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| | <i>ji</i> | <i>jí</i> | <i>je</i> | <i>jich</i> |
| accusative (<i>ji, je</i>) | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| genitive (<i>jí, jich</i>) | 1 | 57 | 0 | 81 |

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| <i>canonical case</i> | <i>clitic</i> | | <i>clitic</i> | |
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- A large corpus always has some typos, copyediting errors, etc.
 - This is a rare construction, and flipped case clusters make up a sizable proportion

Summary

Attested tokens show variable resolution of *four* often competing pressures:

- $1/2 > 3$: (essentially) always holds
- patient $>$ theme: usually wins out
- GEN $>$ ACC: sometimes wins over argument order
- case assignment: occasionally sacrificed to align argument and case orders

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Overall summary

- GEN/ACC combinations are robustly, if quite rarely, attested (contra Franks & King, 2000)
- In two constructions, we see variation in clitic order to satisfy multiple pressures:
 - Person Case Constraint ($1/2 > 3$)
 - patient > theme in ACC-GEN ditransitives
 - GEN > ACC

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- In two constructions, we see variation in clitic order to satisfy multiple pressures:
 - Person Case Constraint ($I/2 > 3$)
 - patient > theme in ACC-GEN ditransitives
 - GEN > ACC
- The GEN-ACC order preference is much weaker than the DAT-ACC order preference
 - Clash with PCC often leads to ungrammaticality, though ACC-DAT order to satisfy PCC is sparsely attested (Sturgeon et al., 2011)
 - DAT-ACC order fully trumps patient-theme order for ACC-DAT ditransitives (Dvořák, 2010; Tabachnick, 2024)

The GEN-ACC preference

Is it really there?

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Why is it weaker than the DAT-ACC preference?

- Widespread syncretism in GEN-ACC clitics – e.g. perhaps syncretic clitics can “count” as one or the other case as needed

The GEN-ACC preference

Is it really there?

- Needed to explain flipped case tokens in ditransitive

Why is it weaker than the DAT-ACC preference?

- Widespread syncretism in GEN-ACC clitics – e.g. perhaps syncretic clitics can “count” as one or the other case as needed

Why is it there at all?

- The source must be some *grammatical* mechanism enforcing DAT > ACC, DAT > GEN, and GEN > ACC
- This 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

- Experimental testing of the relative strength of the different factors
- Extension to other second-position clitic languages
 - Franks and King (2000, pp. 29, 45): ACC-GEN order claimed for Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian
 - Browne (2004): Judgements are mixed, speakers tend to avoid
 - Preliminary corpus study in Slovenian shows similar patterns as Czech

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