External Possession Reconsidered.
Evidence from Latvian spatial expressions.

Salos, August 2011

A brief history

Havers 1911 introduces the term *dativus sympatheticus* to refer to a certain subtype of datives in the Indo-European languages alternating with adnominal possessive genitives but differing from them in expressing 'sympathetic participation in the process expressed by the verb'.

> *die Kugel durchbohrte dem Feinde das Herz*
> *die Kugel durchbohrte das Herz des Feindes*
> 'the bullet pierced the enemy's heart'

This dative stands alongside other datives not licenced by the argument structure of the predicate, such as the *dativus (in)commodi*, the *dativus ethicus* and the *dativus iudicantis*.

This construction raises certain problems for syntactic description because the dative is, at a first glance, hardly distinguishable from an indirect object (as used with verbs like *give*, *show* etc.), but cannot be described as an object because it is not a complement required by the predicate.

In generative grammar and certain models that have grown out of it the equivalence of the two constructions is captured as a kind of movement – possessor raising (Generative Grammar) or possessor ascension (Relational Grammar). This accounts for the problems with argument structure. In other models this problem is solved differently, e. g., in Construction Grammar the EP construction superimposes its own argument structure on the argument structure of the predicate.

In functionalist and typological publication the term **external possession** is now preferred because it does not imply a derivational relationship with the adnominal possessive construction.

The defining properties of an external possessor are:
1. the possessor is coded as a core grammatical relation of the verb (indirect object),
2. the possessor is expressed in a constituent separate from that of the possessum,
3. the possessor phrase is not licenced by the argument structure of the predicative verb. (König 2001, 971)

Syntactic classification of possession

– attributive (adnominal) possession: *Mary's garden*
– predicative possession: *Mary has got a dog.*
– external possession (not universal): *John looked Mary in the eyes*.

This is a syntactic classification. It should not be confused with semantic classifications, which may involve such distinctions as
– inalienable vs alienable (*Mary's eyes/father...* vs. *Mary's dog/house...*)
– temporary vs stable (*I've got your book* vs *I've got a little house*)

Formal expression

The term 'external possessor' does not say anything about formal expression; Haspelmath identifies the use of the dative or its functional equivalents (prepositional phrases) as a feature of Standard Average European.

Other types are available as well, e. g., Russian *u* (this construction competes with the dative, which is also used for external possessors in Russian):

> | *U nego* | *drožat* | *ruki.* |
> |---|---|---|
> | with him | shake | hands |
>
> 'His hands are shaking/shake.'

Here the source construction is 'location' rather than 'goal', as it is in the case of the dative and its equivalents.

Constraints

The use of the external possessor construction (EPC) is usually subject (at least in most European languages) to a series of semantic constraints. These involve

– animacy/sentiency of the possessor:
> | *Direktori-us* | *paspaud-ė* | *darbuotoj-ui* | *rank-ą.* |
> |---|---|---|---|
> | director-NOM | press-PST.3 | employee-DAT | hand-ACC |
>
> 'The director shook the employee's hand'
> | **Paspaudži-au* | *televizori-ui* | *mygtuk-ą.* |
> |---|---|---|
> | press-PST.1SG | TV-set-DAT | button-ACC |
>
> 'I pressed the button of the television set.'

– dynamicity of the predicate:
> | *Vaik-ui* | *sušal-o* | *rank-os.* |
> |---|---|---|
> | child-DAT | get.cold-PRT.3 | hand-NOM.PL |
>
> 'The child's hands grew cold.'
> | **Vaik-ui* | *rank-os* | *šalt-os.* |
> |---|---|---|
> | child-DAT | hand-NOM.PL | cold-NOM.PL.F |
>
> 'The child's   hands are cold.'

– inalienability: constructions with EPC are strongly favoured in the case of body-parts, garments etc.:

Lithuanian
> | *jis* | *užmynė* | *man* | *ant* | *kulno* |
> |---|---|---|---|---|
> | he | stepped | me:DAT | on | heel |
> | *??jis užmynė* | *ant* | *mano* | *kulno* |
> | he | stepped | on | my | heel |

The construction with an adnominal genitive would be highly unnatural here.

Semantic effects

The 'sympathetic participation' mentioned by Havers seems to comprise at least two features mentioned in the more recent literature:
– affectedness, more specifically mental rather than physical affectedness (Haspelmath 1999);
– "perspectivisation of a prominent sentient P(ossessor) which is empathetically linked to the speaker" (Velázquez-Castillo 1999)

This might be viewed as one cluster of features which usually co-occur but can also operate separately. Note that the concept of affectedness is susceptible of different interpretations: Fried speaks (2009) of 'significant consequences for the participant concerned' whereas mental affectedness may not go beyond conscious perception by a sentient participant.

The EPC in Latvian

The Latvian EPC differs markedly from the Average European prototype. There is no animacy constraint :

Tūlīt	*šie*	*atvēr-uš-i*	*naud-as*	*lād-ei*
at.once	they	open-OBL.PST	money-GEN	chest-**DAT**

vāk-u	*un*	*sāk-s*	*naud-u*	*skaitī-t.*
cover-ACC	and	start-FUT.3	money-ACC	count-INF

'They opened the lid of the money chest straight away and there they go counting the money.' (folk tale)

Cf. Lith

*jie	*atidarė*	*pinig-ų*	*skryni-ai*	*dangt-į*
they	open.PST.3	money-GEN	coffin-DAT	lid-ACC

No process, or affectedness, need be implied by the predicative verb: the EPC can be used in constructions with absolutely stative verbs (also, for that matter, in copular constructions):

Ell-a	*zināja*	*nosaukum-us*	*aug-iem*	*un*	*radīb-ām.*
PN-NOM	know.PST.3	name-ACC.PL	plant-DAT.PL	and	creature-DAT.PL

'Ella knew the names of plants and (living) creatures.' (Dzintars Sodums)

Word order

Often the only reason for the use of the EPC seems to be the wish to change word order, e. g., when a postmodifier needs to be added to the possessor NP:

Tā	*sauc-a*	*piekt-o*	*stāv-u*	*kād-am*	*nam-am*
so	call-PST.3	fifth-ACC.SG	floor-ACC.SG	some-DAT.SG.M	house-DAT.SG

Todlēben-a	*bulvār-ī*	*pretim*	*Strēlniek-u*	*dārz-am.*
PN-GEN	boulevard-LOC.SG	vis–à-vis	fuselier-GEN.PL	garden-DAT.SG

'That was the name given to **the fifth floor of a certain house** on Todtleben Boulevard, vis–à-vis the Fuseliers' Garden.' (Augusts Deglavs)

Information structure

This, however, cannot be the only reason. Cf. the following pair of examples, which display no difference in word order:

šie	*atvēruši*	*naudas*	*lādes*	*vāku*
šie	*atvēruši*	*naudas*	*lādei*	*vāku*
they	opened	money	chest	lid

But even if there is no difference in word order, there is a possible difference in information structure: the number or clausal constituents is increased, which increases the degree of articulation of the sentence in terms of information structure. The NP *lādei* may be a subordinate theme (topic), whereas the NP *lādes vāku* will normally be an indivisible unit in information structure.

This, I will argue, is an important aspect of the EPC: it increases the degree of articulation of the sentence in terms of information structure. The argument structure of the predicate remains the same, but the EPC produces a larger number of units of information structure than the argument structure is able to licence. Cf.

Man	*sušalo*	*rankos.*
me:DAT	get.cold.PST3	hands:NOM

'My hands are cold.'

The 1st person pronoun is here introduced as the main sentence topic (by itself, *sušalti* 'get cold' is a one-place predicate'). In transitive sentences, the external possessor becomes a subordinate topic. The importance of topicality (formulated as 'logical subjecthood') as a property of external possessors is noted by Aissen (1999).

Spatial constructions in Latvian
Important insights can be gained from the semantic effects of the EPC in constructions with spatial (relational) nouns.
Spatial expressions in Latvian may be based on
– prepositions: *uz galda* 'on the table'
– relational adverbs (Lagzdiņa 1993; the traditional name is *pusprievārdi* 'semi-prepositions'); they govern a noun in the dative but have no fixed position with regard to it.

apkārt	*galdam* /	*galdam*	*apkārt*
around	table:DAT/	table:DAT	around

– relational nouns, e. g. *priekša* 'front'

durvju	*priekšā* 'in front of the door'
door:GEN	front:LOC

The term 'relational noun' is here introduced on the analogy of languages lacking prepositions and expressing spatial and other relations with the aid of nouns (e. g., names of body parts such as 'head', 'back' etc.). This is an areal feature of the Meso-American languages.

Relational nouns have never been singled out in Latvian grammar, perhaps because words like *priekša* retain their nominal properties even though functionally they correspond to the prepositions of other languages: they do not lose their inflection (as in *priekšā* > *priekš* 'for'), they have no constant position with regard to the noun and they have no consistent government.

The EPC in constructions with relational nouns
Relational nouns are accompanied by nouns in the genitive, which, like all adnominal genitives in Latvian, are obligatorily preposed:
mājas priekšā 'in front of the house'
*priekšā mājas
Just as in the case of other adnominal genitives, however, the EPC may be used; the position of the possessor NP with regard to the possessum NP is then, of course, free (though word order is strictly regulated in the Latvian noun phrase, the order of clausal constituents is free and determined mainly by information structure):

stāvēja	*durvīm*	*priekšā*	/	*priekšā*	*durvīm*
stood	door.DAT	front.LOC		front.LOC	door.DAT

The EPC is attended by certain semantic effects to be discussed further on.

A case study: *priekšā*
In some cases the dative seems to be associated with affectedness: its use conveys the idea of obstruction, cf.

vārt-u	*priekš-ā*	*ir*	*smilš-u*	*kaudz-e*
gate-GEN	front-LOC	is	sand-GEN	heap-NOM

'there is a heap of sand in front of the gate'

vārt-iem	*priekš-ā*	*ir*	*smilš-u*	*kaudz-e*
gate-DAT	front-LOC	is	sand-GEN	heap-NOM

'the gate is obstructed by a heap of sand'

When the dative is used, emphasis is not on the location of the heap of sand, but on the situation involving the gate.

Figure and ground

But there is also a decond difference which will prove to be significant further on. Spatial location is based on the contrast between ground and figure (cf. work by Talmy, e. g., Talmy 2000):

the newspaper	*on*	*the table*
smaller		larger
mobile location		stable location
location to be established		location known
salient		less salient

The natural relationship between ground and figure may be reversed in certain 'characterising uses' (Herskovits 1986), cf.

a rabbit in the conjuror's hat
a girl in a straw hat

The effect of the EPC in constructions with *priekšā* is to represent a situation as viewed from the perspective of the reference object (ground) rather than from that of the located object (figure). There may also be an element of affectedness, but this may also be lacking. Instead, we sometimes see that the reference object, if animate and sentient, become the observer from whose vantage point the situation is described.

Animate and sentient reference objects

In this case the dative is also used:

Man	*priekš-ā*	*ir*	*Materhorn-s,*		*bet*	*aizmugur-ē*	*Gorner-a*
1SG.DAT	front-LOC	is	Matterhorn-NOM		but	back-LOC	Gorner-GEN
ledājs.							
glacier-NOM							

'I have the Matterhorn in front of me and the Gorner Glacier behind me.'

The emphasis is not on the location of the Matterhorn but on what the subjects sees around him (and what helps him to establish his bearings), cf. the use of the verb *have* in the English translation.

The same applies, of course, if the whole spatial relation is used metaphorically to describe a temporal relationship.

Vēl	*man*	*priekš-ā*	*ir*	*vann-as*	*istab-as*	*flīzēšan-a.*
still	1SG.DAT	front-LOC	is	bath-GEN.SG	room-GEN.SG	tiling-NOM

'The tiling of the bathroom is still ahead of me.'
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The emphasis is on what a sentient subject sees before him when looking into the future.

The idea of outdistancing

The dative is always used for a person outdistanced by another person moving in the same direction:

Izrādās,	*es*	*nemaz*	*ne-esmu*	*pats*
turn.out.PRS.3	I	by.no.means	NEG-am	very
gudrākais–	*man*	*priekš-ā*	*ir*	*cit-i*	*skrējēj-i.*
wisest	1SG.DAT	front-LOC	are	other	runners.NOM

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'It turns out that I am by no means the cleverest—other runners are ahead of me.'

In this case both participants are animate and sentient, both are affected or unaffected to the same degree. But here a natural vantage point is introduced by the meaning of the predicate. The relation of being 'before' / 'in front of' is symmetrical only in the case of persons/objects facing each other. In the case of persons moving in the same direction it can be described as such only from the vantage point of the person lagging behind. In this case as well, the situation is described from the vantage point of the reference object/ground.

A metaphorical use
There is also an interesting metaphorical use: 'before' referring to the witnesses of a certain behaviour, treatment etc. Only the genitive is used here:

Ciet-uš-ais		*jūtas*	*apkauno-ts*		*un*
Suffer-PRTC.ACT.PST-NOM.SG.M		feel.PRS.3	shame-PRTC.PASS.PST		and
pazemo-t-s	*vis-as*		*pasaul-es*	*priekš-ā.*	
humiliate-PRTC.PASS.PST	whole-GEN.SG		world-GEN.SG	front-LOC	

'The victim feels shamed and humiliated before the whole world.' (Pāvils Rozītis)

Both participants are animate and sentient. The witness is the observer of the situation, but he is not marked with the dative. Perhaps the sentient observer and the affected participant do not coincide in this case? What should determine the choice?

I suggest that the inherently local character of this metaphorical expression is decisive. We have here a metaphorical appliaction of a type of location of the subject (cf. English *put to shame*); the situation of the figure (located object) not the ground is characterised, and therefore only the genitive can be used.

Generalising
The common property of constructions with the dative is a reversal of the ground-figure relationship. The located object should normally be the more salient object whose situation (= location is characterised). The EPC marks a shift of saliency from the located object (figure) to the reference object (ground).

This saliency can be conceived as cognitive saliency (as far as the organisation of the spatial scene is concerned), but also as discourse saliency (through this aspect the construction interacts with the whole sentential context in which it is embedded).

Linking the two types of use
What is the link between the spatial and non-spatial uses of the EPC in Latvian?

It is generally known that there is a link between possession and location, so that there can also be said to be a link between the genitival construction (prototypically expressing a possessive relation) and the spatial constructions.

In a genitival construction, a discourse entity is identified through its relation with a better known discourse entity. The head of a genitival construction is a salient entity (figure) located with regard to a less salient entity (ground).

In a spatial construction the effect of the EPC is to shift saliency from the figure to the ground.

Outside the specifically spatial domain, the effect of the EPC in a genitival construction will be to shift discourse saliency from the head to the possessor.

In a sentential context the saliency contrasts existing within the noun phrase interact with saliency differences at clausal level.

These saliency differences are grammaticalised in a series of ways that are subsumed under the general notion of obliqueness.

The noun phrases in any clause are arranged in a cline of descending discourse saliency, known as the obliqueness hierarchy. The notion of obliqueness hierarchy was introduced in the literature in the 1970s by Keenan and Comrie. These authors operate with the notion of accessibility hierarchy (determining the relative ease with which different grammatical relations are accessible to various morphosyntactic operations); differences in accessibility provide the obliqueness hypothesis with an empirically verifiable basis.

The obliqueness hierarchy is reflected in the system of grammatical relations (SUBJECT > DIRECT OBJECT > INDIRECT OBJECT > OBLIQUE), but also in the unmarked pattern of topic-comment structure, in which the subject is the unmarked main theme, the direct object the unmarked subordinate theme etc.

The effect of the ECP is generally to raise the possessor to a higher degree of saliency than it normally has within the nominal phrase (where it constitutes, in principle, the less salient ground!). By becoming a separate clausal constituent, the possessor assumes the position it would naturally occupy in the obliqueness hierarchy in virtue of its typical animacy and topicworthiness. Animacy (and a concomitant high degree of topicworthiness) will normally determine a high (that is, less oblique) position in the obliqueness hierarchy. This is why the ECP applies mainly to animates: there is no 'obliqueness clash' in the case of inanimate possessors.

Animacy entails, of course, sentiency and the possibility of mental affectedness. The affectedness effect is, however, epiphenomenal.

Formulated in the most general way, the ECP reflects the shifting of cognitive or discourse saliency from the figure/possessum to the ground/possessor in a locative/possessive structure.

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