

A Construct State Analysis for Puzzling Slavic Possessors

Background A peculiar feature of Slavic languages is the possibility of complex possessor expressions of the kind illustrated in (1)–(5). Complex possessors are attested in older stages of Slavic and in a number of the modern languages (see Löttsch 1965, Corbett 1987). Earlier analyses of complex-possessor constructions have not covered the data in its entirety (wrt languages and types) and fail to give satisfactory accounts of the phenomenon in the languages that were analyzed, cf., e.g., Ružička (1992), Babyonyshev (1997), Pesetsky (2013), and Veselovská (2018). So the task arises to complete the data set, systematize the data, adequately determine the history and the present-day functions of the suffixes forming the possessive adjectives (PAs), and develop an analysis that integrates the crucial morpho-syntactic and semantic features.

Issue Complex Possessors (CPs) minimally consist of an element α and a PA. There appear to exist two types of CPs. In Type A CPs, the pre-PA α is a kinship term, courtesy title, or a person's given name, cf. (1a-c). With Type B CPs, α is a possessive pronoun or a qualifying adjective, cf. (2a), (3a) vs. (2b), (3b). Russian and Czech have CPs of type A only, whereas Upper Sorbian and Slovak have CPs of both types. The agreement relations are intriguing: (i) α depends on the natural gender feature of the nominal stem of the PA. (ii) The PA's ϕ -features and case are determined by the possessum. This is illustrated in the schema below.

The paper will tackle the following challenges: (i) to explain the incongruous morphological marking in CPs – α bears genitive case, whereas the underlying nominal is suffixed by the possessive marker *-in/-ov-*; (ii) to account for the dual behavior of the PA – on the one hand, it controls the gender specification of α (cf. Corbett 1987), and, on the other, agrees with the possessum; (iii) to propose an analysis that covers the attested options for CP placement, i.e. placement in pre- vs. post-possessum position, cf. (4a, 5a) vs. (4b, 5b).

Analysis Following assumptions made in the theory of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), morphology is treated as syntax. The content of a noun is distributed over different syntactic levels – here, nP and NumP. We analyze complex possessors as a type of construct state – a constituent with the internal structure of a phrase but word-like outer status. These peculiar properties are the basis for the explanation of two phenomena: (i) internal inflection (α with genitive case), and (ii) derivation by means of the *-in/-ov-* suffix followed by inflection (agreement). The suffix *-in-* and its allomorph *-ov-* realize the semantic features [poss], which relates the possessor to the possessum, and [unit], which singles out a referent from a set denoted by the possessum phrase. This accounts for the observation that, generally, a possessum must be non-unique, cf. *I have^{ok} a book/*the book* (Partee 1999). The unit-marking function of *-in-* originates in the Proto-Slavic **inъ* ‘one’ as preserved, e.g., in Russian *od-in* (Vasmer 1955). The syntactic derivation proceeds in several steps: (i) possessum-NumP, (ii) definite construct state (dcs) as a possessor, (iii) *-in/-ov-* realize Poss and Class, spelling out the feature bundle [poss, unit], (iv) dcs+Poss/Class merger, Poss assigns Genitive to the possessor-dcs, (v) movement of the complex Poss to noun-phrase internal Agr, (vi) overt or covert movement of the possessum to [Spec, AgrP]. See the tree below.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|----|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| (1) | a. | těti | Ninino | pis'mo | (Russian) |
| | | aunt.gen.sg.f | Nina.poss.nom.sg.n | letter.nom.sg.n ‘aunt Nina’s letter’ | |
| | b. | pána | učiteľova | palica | (Slovak) |
| | | Mister.gen.sg.m | teacher.poss.nom.sg.f | cane.nom.sg.f ‘the teacher’s cane’ | |

- c. Cyrila Koloweje wjeselohry (Upper Sorbian)
Cyril.gen.sg.m Kola.poss.nom.pl.f comedies.nom.pl.f ‘Cyril Kola’s comedies’
- (2) a. našeho nanowe knihi (Upper Sorbian)
our.gen.sg.m father.poss.nom.pl.f books.nom.pl.f ‘our father’s books’
- b. młodoh mužowe sotry
young.gen.sg.m man.poss.nom.pl.f sisters.nom.pl.f ‘the young man’s sisters’
- (3) a. mojej matkina práca (Slovak)
my.gen.sg.f mother.poss.nom.sg.f work.nom.sg.f ‘my mother’s work’
- b. dobrého susedova záhrada
good.gen.sg.m neighbor.poss.nom.sg.f garden.nom.sg.f ‘the good neighbor’s garden’
- (4) a. môjho otcov dom (Slovak)
my.gen.sg.m father.poss.nom.sg.m house.nom.sg.m ‘my father’s house’
- b. dom môjho otcov ‘my father’s house’
- (5) a. páně inspektorova tvář (Czech)
Mister.gen.sg.m inspector.poss.nom.sg.f face.nom.sg.f ‘the inspector’s face’
- b. tvář páně inspektorova ‘the inspector’s face’

Type A:

ex. (1a)

		nom.sg.neut	
těti	Nin-	in-o	pis'm-o
aunt	Nin-	poss.sg.n	letter.sg.n
gen.sg.fem	fem		

‘aunt Nina’s letter’

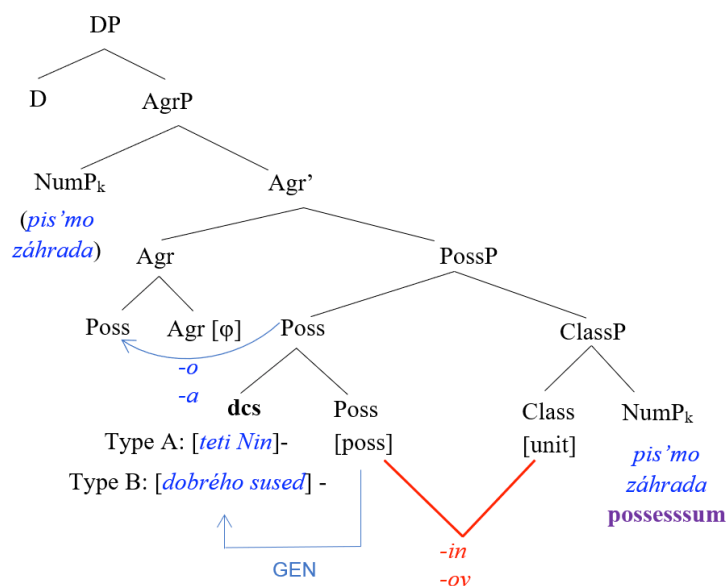
Type B:

ex. (3b)

		nom.sg.fem	
dobrého	sused-	ov-a	záhrada
good	neighbor-	poss.sg.f	garden.sg.f
gen.sg.masc	masc		

‘the good neighbor’s garden’

Schema: Agreement relations



Note: The internal structure of the dcs is not shown in the tree.