

# “How do we know what anything means?”

- ‘enriched’ grammatical structure:
  - conventional patterns of speakers’ understanding,  
a.k.a. “text semantics” (Fillmore 1982: 122)
  - socio-pragmatic anchoring of linguistic structure

## → Frame Semantics

- semantics of understanding
- ‘interpretive frames’ (background scene and participants)
- ‘frame elements’ and their conventional expression in syntax

# The notion of ‘frame’

- conventional schematization of speakers’ knowledge about the world and about distinct discourse situations
- shaped culturally and individually
- provide semantic and pragmatic information relevant to interpreting linguistic expressions

# ...shared background frame

|     |   | BUY  | COST   |
|-----|---|--|--|
|     |   | inherit Subject  | inherit Subject  |
| syn |   | $\begin{bmatrix} \text{cat} & \text{v} \\ \text{max} & - \\ \text{lex} & + \end{bmatrix}$  | $\begin{bmatrix} \text{cat} & \text{v} \\ \text{max} & - \\ \text{lex} & + \end{bmatrix}$  |
| sem |   | $\begin{bmatrix} \text{frame COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION} \\ \text{FE } \#1 [ \text{Buyer} ] \\ \text{FE } \#2 [ \text{Seller} ] \\ \text{FE } \#3 [ \text{Goods} ] \\ \text{FE } \#4 [ \text{Money} ] \end{bmatrix}$ | $\begin{bmatrix} \text{frame COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION} \\ \text{FE } \#1 [ \text{Buyer} ] \\ \text{FE } \#2 [ \text{Seller} ] \\ \text{FE } \#3 [ \text{Goods} ] \\ \text{FE } \#4 [ \text{Money} ] \end{bmatrix}$ |
| val | { | $\#1 [\text{rel} \begin{bmatrix} \theta & \text{agt} \\ \text{DA} & + \end{bmatrix}, \#3 [\text{rel} \begin{bmatrix} \theta & \text{pat} \\ \text{DA} & - \end{bmatrix}]}$                                       | $\#3 [\text{rel} \begin{bmatrix} \theta & \text{agt} \\ \text{DA} & + \end{bmatrix}, \#4 [\text{rel} \begin{bmatrix} \theta & \text{pat} \\ \text{DA} & - \end{bmatrix}]}$                                       |
| lxm |   | <i>buy</i>   | <i>cost</i>  |

# Frames & constructions in practice

- *Theoretical questions to be addressed*
  - boundaries of a linguistic category
  - interaction between linguistic form, linguistic meaning, and conceptual structure
  - status of the notion of prototype in constructional analysis
  - systematic account of shifts and extensions
  - mental representations of speakers' linguistic knowledge

# Possession

- *Issues of interest:*
  - many-to-many mappings between forms and meanings
  - relevant conceptual structure(s)  
*ownership* vs. *part-whole* vs. *relational*
  - linguistic patterning of ‘possessibility’
  - form-based generalizations about **possessors**

NP-internal

vs.

NP-external

*in Czech:* *GEN, poss. adj.*

*DAT*

- nature of external (=dative) possessor

# Possession – cont.

- *Scope of present case study*
  - conceptually: time-stable, presupposed possession
  - formally: distribution of GEN vs. DAT
  - functionally: attributive (cf. Heine 1997, Croft 2001)
- data: *Czech National Corpus*
- *Examples* (exs. 1-2 on data handout)

# Is there such a thing as Dative Possessor?

- *General consensus:*

- fluid boundaries between GEN and DAT
- fluid boundaries between possessive and other meanings of DAT

- traditional conclusions:

- DAT is *not* a syntactically distinct expression of possession
  - possessive reading is left to interpretation in a given context

- *Open-ended observations:*

- non-synonymy of GEN and DAT
  - apparently special status of body parts and kinship terms
  - definition of ‘possession’

- *Unanswered questions:*

- Can/should conceptual relations be part of conventional grammatical patterning (hence, figure in grammatical descriptions)?
- Can/should contextual clues be ‘systematized’ as part of grammatical descriptions?
- Is dative possessor a distinct grammatical category, and if so:
  - how does it manifest itself as such?
  - how does it relate to the GEN patterns?
  - how does it relate to other DAT nominals?
- What to do about arguments that are not ‘projected’ by the head verb (applicatives, ‘free’ datives, etc.)?

# Background

- *Types of Czech dative:*
  - ‘thematic’ (Affected Dative & subtypes; exs. 3)

```
syn [ cat      v      ]
      [ lex      +      ]
Affected Dative
val { [ rel      [ θ      'indirect affect' ] ]
       [ syn      [ case    dat ] ] ] }
```

# Background

- *Types of Czech dative:*
  - ‘thematic’ (Affected Dative & subtypes; exs. 3)
  - ‘free’ (Dative of Interest; ex. 4)

## Dative of Interest

inherit Affected Dative

prag [ 'introduce an interested party; speaker's subjective assessment of event' ]

sem [ 'circumstances described by the predicate have significant consequences  
for the interested party, whose referent is not in control of the event' ]

val { [rel [θ 'interest']] }  
      [sem [animate +]]

# Assumptions of present analysis

## 1. *about possessiveness:*

- possession in the narrow sense of ownership, separate from part-whole relations
- notion of **prototype** as a representational category (Taylor 1989, Heine 1997):
  - ✓ possession = *experiential gestalt* → P-or = animate
  - ✓ range of prototypical Possessa
- standard possibility hierarchy (cross-linguistic)  
*body parts > kinship > close alienable > distant alienable*

## *2. about the nature of speakers' knowledge:*

- speakers store conventional **patterns of understanding** (cf. Fillmore 1982)
- these get activated in production and interpretation of linguistic form

## *3. about analytic goals and methods:*

- focus shift “from words as building blocks to usage events, in all their contextual detail” (Cuyckens & al. 2003: 21)
- constructional and frame-semantic approach for representing grammatical knowledge

# Dative & Genitive constructions

- conventional clusters of semantic, pragmatic, and morphosyntactic constraints
- functional prototypes in a network of ‘attributive’ possession and part-whole relations

# Possessor

## *Non-synonymy of GEN and DAT*

- Extreme cases? exs. (5-6)
  - Possessum = body part
  - crosslinguistically common pattern of constraints [e.g. Payne & Barshi 1999]
- Familiar contrasts exs. (7-11)
  - *affectedness* of Possessor in (a) forms (7-10)
  - *discourse prominence* in (11a)

# Possessum

- Genitive pattern – unrestricted

(12) *Han-in-y ruce / sestry / kamarádky / knihy / názory / povinnosti*

Hana-POSS.F-NOM.PL hands / sisters / friends / books / opinions / duties

(13) *děkoval mi za Jan-ov-u pomoc*  
thank.PST.SG.M 1SG.DAT for Jan-POSS.M-ACC.SG.F help.ACC.SG.F  
'he thanked me for Jan's help'

# Possessum

- **Dative** pattern vis-à-vis possessibility hierarchy  
body parts > kinship > close alienable > distant alienable  
and prototypical ownership:  
concrete > abstract; inanimate > animate

Possessa in CNK (sample):

*vlas* ‘hair’, *uši* ‘ears’, *otec* ‘father’, *peníze* ‘money’, *listek* ‘ticket’, *dveře* ‘door’, *pytel* ‘sack’, *hračky* ‘toys, *vodovod* ‘water-pipe’, *svět* ‘world, *cesta* ‘journey’, *sebevědomí* ‘self-confidence’, *život* ‘life’, *svatba* ‘wedding’, *reforma* ‘reform’, *králík* ‘rabbit’, *kůň* ‘horse’, etc.

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# Conventionally expected Possessa

- a. *things that are part of self* (body parts; name, title; speech; life; doubt, memory, intention, right to decide, self-confidence, etc.)
- b. *members of 'family'*, understood broadly as a culturally established unit of shared domestic life (kinship relations; pets and other domestic animals)
- c. *garments and their parts*
- d. *environment perceived as essential to our existence*, including dwellings and their parts (world; house, door, plumbing, bathroom; prison cell; backyard)

- e. *objects useful in an individual's daily life* (cars, toys, flashlight, money, tickets, guitar strings)
- f. *common activities and established rituals*  
(journey, wedding, funeral, graduation, education, vacation, holiday)
- g. *social and/or political organization* (state/country, constitution, reform)

Non-occurring abstract possessa (sample):

*hodnota* 'value', *krása* 'beauty', *kvalita* 'quality',  
*chyba* 'mistake', *moudrost* 'wisdom', *výmluva*  
'excuse', *nadřazenost* 'superiority', etc.

# Context-dependent Possessa

Sample from CNK:

*branka* ‘goal/score [in soccer]’, *brankář* ‘goalie’,  
*pacient* ‘[hospital] patient’, *tramvaj* ‘street car’, *dřevo*  
‘wood’, *smlouva* ‘contract’, etc.

- in specialized contexts
- sometimes in distinct discourse type (sports reporting)
- more transient, non-essential

# Verb semantics

Sample from CNK:

- *'contact' predicates*

*spravit* ‘fix’, *proštípnout* ‘punch through’, *čistit* ‘clean’, *postřílet* ‘shoot down’, *narovnat* ‘straighten’, *roztrhnout* ‘tear’, *přivázat* ‘tie to st.’, *hodit* ‘toss’, *umýt* ‘wash’, etc.

- *other affective Vs*

*komolit* ‘mangle’, *ničit* ‘ruin’, *osvěžit* ‘refresh’, etc.

- *Vs of removing*

*vzít* ‘take away’, *sežrat* ‘gobble up’, *vyloučit* ‘expel’, *krást* ‘steal’, *ztratit* ‘lose’, etc.

# Verb semantics – cont.

- *Vs of states and spontaneous processes*

*zemřít* ‘die’, *rozpadat se* ‘fall apart’, *zřítil se* ‘collapse’,  
*rozbít se* ‘break down’, *padat* ‘fall’, *zmizet* ‘disappear’,  
*mrznout* ‘freeze’, *zešílet* ‘go crazy’, *cukat* ‘twitch’, *třást se*  
‘shiver’, *smrdět* ‘stink’, etc.

NB: Contextual affectedness/interest is not sufficient  
(ex. 15)

# Verb semantics – cont.

→ universal hierarchy of verb types for external Possessors:

{strongly transitive, non-active intransitive}

> active intransitive

>> weakly transitive (Vs of perception, cognition)

# Syntactic constraints on Possessum

## *Non-synonymy of GEN vs DAT revisited*

[GEN vs. \*DAT]

- (16b) \*...*vlasy jí*<sub>DAT</sub> *ho nesmírně vzrušovaly*

‘...her hair excited him enormously’

- (17b) \**Natali-i*<sub>DAT</sub> *maj rodiče furtňákej státní svátek...*

‘Natalie’s parents have state holidays all the time’

- (18) **Peníze**<sub>NOM</sub> **mu**<sub>DAT</sub> *vždycky komplikovaly život*<sub>ACC</sub>

(i) ‘Money always complicated his life’

(ii) \*‘His money always complicated [someone else’s] life.’

# Syntactic constraints on Possessum

- *why not DAT in exs. (16-18) ?*

For DAT:

- potential Possessum high on possibility hierarchy (16,17)
- affective verb semantics (16,18)

Against DAT:

- potential Possessor not necessarily affected (16,17)
- Possessum = transitive subject

# Syntactic constraints on Possessum

- Competition between two factors in selecting GEN vs DAT:
    - Possessor affectedness & (in)alienability of Possessum
    - affectedness > inalienability
- conforms to universal syntactic hierarchy of Possessa with External Possessors:
- trans. OBJ, obliques > intrans. SUB >> trans. SUB  
(correlates with the verb hierarchy)

# Plain vs. Situated Possession

- Interim conclusion:
    - two distinct patterns, two possessive conceptualizations:
      - PLAIN possession (GEN)
      - SITUATED possession (DAT)
    - shared properties:
      - pre-existing possessive relationship
      - human Possessor
- shared “interpretive frame” (Fillmore 1982):

frame POSSESSION:    FE#1 Possessor [+human]  
                                FE#2 Possessum [on poss. hierarchy]

# Situated possession - summary

- Possessor

- is a participant in the depicted event (i.e., sensitive to verb semantics)
- is (indirectly) affected by the event
- is distinct from other datives (semantically, syntactically)
- can fully participate in information structure relations

- Possessum

- comes from a semantically defined and restricted class of items
- must be affected by the depicted event
- is prohibited in certain syntactic functions
- can fully participate in information structure relations

# Constructional representation

## Affected Possessor construction

syn [cat v, lex +] inherit Dative-of-Interest

prag ['greater discourse prominence of Possessor vis-à-vis Possessum']

sem [ 'circumstances described by the predicate have significant consequences for the interested party (#1), whose referent is not in control of the event' ]

frame POSSESSION

FE #1 Possessor [human]

FE #2 Possessum [ ]

val {#1 [sem.role 'interest'], #2 sem. role 'non-agentive'}

case DAT

syn [cat v, lex +]

sem [ frame [affective]  
FE #2 [ ] ]

val {...#2 [ ]...}

# Constructional representation

## Genitive Possessor construction

inherit Modification

syn [cat n]

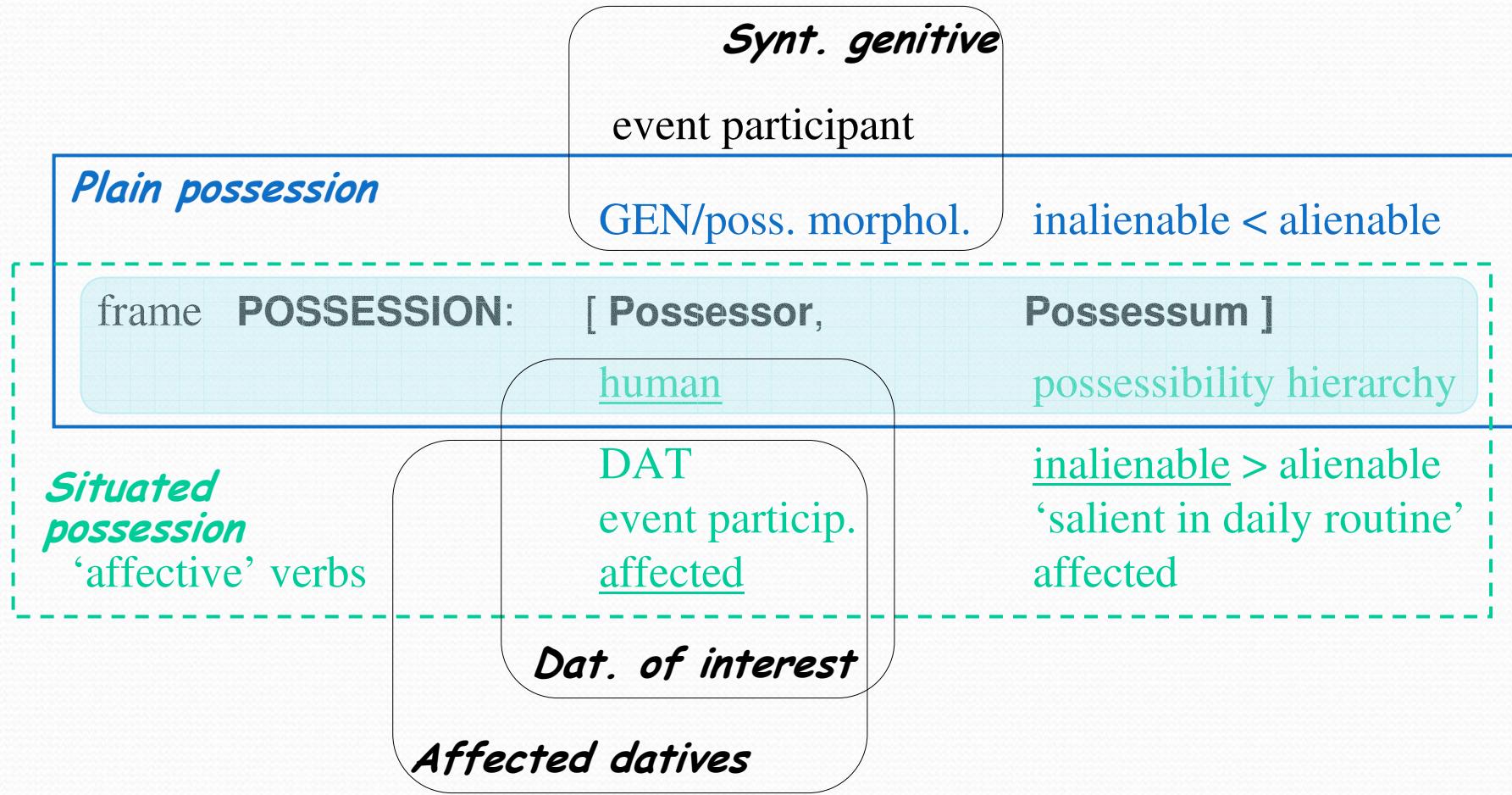
prag ['restrict reference of the head by property expressed by modifier']

sem [frame POSSESSION  
          FE #1 Possessor [human]  
          FE #2 Possessum []]

#1    cat [ poss. {pro; -UV / IN} ]  
      role modification  
      morphol. [ case    #i [] ]  
            number #j []  
            gender #k [] ]

#2    cat n  
      role head  
      morphol. [ case    #i [] ]  
            number #j []  
            gender #k [] ]

# Possessive network



# Extensions

imperfect match between frame elements and lexical fillers

→ departures from prototypical possession:

- construction-mediated manipulation of POSSESSION frame
  - contextually motivated & genre-based stretching of possibility (ex. 19)
  - reinterpretation of Possessor in the frame (exs. 20-21; ‘personification’)
- ‘attraction’ of non-possessive constructions into the possessive space, on a continuum (ex. 19, 22 vs. 23)

# Conclusions - I

- *Non-synonymy of GEN vs. DAT*
  - two distinct conceptualizations of Possession frame
  - each expressed by a conventional cluster of co-occurring constraints
    - a grammatical construction:
      - semantic, pragmatic, morphosyntactic, conceptual features
      - in DAT construction – layering of affectedness and possession, with consequences for syntax; not just left to context
- *Special status of body parts and kinship*
  - follows from culturally determined conventional understanding of possibility
  - top of hierarchy preferentially (or obligatorily) attracts DAT Possessor construction
- *Possession as a prototype*
  - overlapping with, but distinct from, part-whole and relational frames

# Conclusions - II

- *Conceptual relations in grammatical descriptions*  
not to replace linguistic meaning, but to motivate it when relevant in shaping linguistic form
- *Systematic account of contextual clues*  
notion of ‘frame’ as a schematization of speakers’ conventional understanding: organizes and structures linguistically relevant semantic information
- *Dative Possessor as a distinct category*  
yes, as a complex, multidimensional construction, but **not** the Dative form itself
- *Predictability of shifts within a functional space*  
set of features that are instrumental in various partial shifts, giving rise to and at the same time constraining novel usages