

The order of genitive and accusative clitics in Czech

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Outline

- 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.’ (SYNVI I)

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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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)

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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

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		3SG.F		1PL		2PL	
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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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- 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.

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'many more of them await him.'

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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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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
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(SYNvII I)

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(SYNvII)

Attested tokens show variable resolution of two often competing pressures:

- GEN extracted from subject $>$ ACC object: usually (but not always) observed
- $1/2 > 3$: 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)

Previous reports

- **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’	111063	322	0.29%
	svěřit	‘entrust’	78898	913	1.16%
ACC-DAT	podřídit	‘subordinate’	13219	23	0.17%
	poskytnout	‘provide’	768027	2661	0.35%
DAT-ACC	darovat	‘gift’	112153	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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When both clitics are 3, strong preference for patient-theme order

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<i>person</i>		<i>order</i>		
GEN	ACC	GA	AG	<i>flipped</i> GA
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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>jí</i>)	1	5
genitive (<i>ji</i>)	1	57

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 - 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
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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 ($1/2 > 3$)
 - 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)

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Is it really there?

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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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