

What Does it Mean to “Have Jupiter” in Czech?: A Case of Semantic Bleaching

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Abstract

When accompanied by a locative phrase, the Czech possessive construction of the form “nominative NP + possessive verb *mít* + accusative NP” can express a locative relation in addition to the prototypical ownership relation. It can also be used to talk about relations that lack some of the features associated with the prototypical ownership relation, in which case it has restrictions imposed on the grammatical person of its subject, the tense of *mít*, and the types of sentence it can be used in. This paper argues that these restrictions arise from the fact that the construction in question is a kind of performative, one that expresses an epistemic relation between the addressee and the possessee.

1. Introduction

In the Czech language, some kinds of locative relationship can be expressed either by the EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTION of the form “nominative NP + existential verb *být*” or by the POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTION of the form “nominative NP (possessor) + HAVE-type possessive verb *mít* + accusative noun phrase (possessee)”, as illustrated in (1a) and (1b), respectively.

- (1) a. Na stole je kniha. (existential construction)
on table.SG.LOC be.3SG.PRS book.SG.NOM
‘There is a book on the table.’
- b. Mám na stole knihu. (possessive construction)
have.1SG.PRS on table.SG.LOC book.SG.ACC
‘I have a book on the table.’

(1a) denotes a locative relation involving an object (i.e. *book*) and a place (i.e. *table*). (1b), on the other hand, denotes a possessive relationship which holds between a possessor (i.e. the speaker) and a possessee (i.e. *book*), in addition to expressing the same locative relation as (1a) does.

- (2) a. Kde je Jupiter (existential construction)
 where be.3SG.PRS Jupiter.SG.NOM
 ‘Where is Jupiter?’
- b. Jupiter je vedle Saturnu. (existential construction)
 Jupiter.SG.NOM be.3SG.PRS next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 ‘Jupiter is next to Saturn.’
- c. Jupiter máš vedle Saturnu. (possessive construction)
 Jupiter.SG.ACC have.2SG.PRS next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 ‘Jupiter is next to Saturn (lit. You have Jupiter next to Saturn).’
- d. *Kde máš Jupiter? (possessive construction)
 where have.2SG.PRS Jupiter.SG.ACC
 Intended: ‘Where is Jupiter?’

The existential construction in (2a) can be used to ask where Jupiter is located. This question can be answered either by the existential construction in (2b) or by the possessive construction in (2c). In contrast, the possessive construction in (2d) can not be used for the same purpose, which indicates that despite their similarities, the two types of constructions do differ in the range of uses to which they are put.

The present paper aims to identify some of the conditions under which possessive constructions can be used to express locative relations, thereby suggesting the typical functions these constructions serve.

2. Prototypical/peripheral ownership and location

This section explores how locative meaning can be involved in the prototypical use of the possessive construction. First, (3) expresses a relationship between a possessor (i.e. the speaker) and a possessee (i.e. *book*).

- (3) Mám na stole knihu.
 have.1SG.PRS on table.SG.LOC book.SG.ACC
 ‘I have a book on the table’

This relationship is typically associated with features such as the following: (i) AVAILABILITY: the possessor can make use of or change the state/location of the possessee (e.g. the possessor can read the book, put it in another place, dispose of it), (ii) RESPONSIBILITY: the possessor is held responsible for what happens to the possessee (e.g. if the book is damaged by the sun, it is the possessor's fault because he/she could have prevented it), (iii) EXCLUSIVENESS: the possessor has exclusive access to the possessee (e.g. other people can read the book or dispose of it only with the permission of the possessor). A relationship that can be viewed as having these features is generally called OWNERSHIP

and can be encoded by possessive constructions in many languages (cf. Taylor 1996, Langacker 2009: ch.4, Aikhenvald 2013, Asaoka 2017).

Second, (3) expresses not only an ownership relation between the possessor (i.e. the speaker) and the possessee (i.e. *book*), but a locative relation involving the possessee (i.e. *book*) and a place (i.e. *table*). Thus the possessive construction can denote an ownership relation and a locative relation at the same time. In other words, if a situation is construed as one where there is an ownership relation holding between a person and an object as well as a locative relation involving the possessed object, then both of these relations can be expressed by a single possessive construction.

There are, however, cases where possessive constructions can encode relations that have only some of the features mentioned above.

2.1. Relations that have only availability

- (4) a. Mám tady pekárnu.
 have.1SG.PRS here bakery.SG.ACC
 ‘There is a bakery here. (lit. I have a bakery here)’
- b. Máš tady někde pekárnu?
 have.2SG.PRS here somewhere bakery.SG.ACC
 ‘Is there a bakery here? (lit. Do you have a bakery here?)’

While (4a) may be interpreted as an instance of prototypical ownership (i.e. where the speaker owns the bakery), it is more likely to mean that there is a bakery the speaker often makes use of. In the latter case, although the speaker can make use of the bakery in a certain way (e.g. she can buy bread there), this relationship is not exclusive (e.g. other people can make use of the bakery in the same way as she can). While the relationship in question diverges from the prototypical ownership at least in this respect, it can be expressed by the possessive construction by virtue of its similarity to the prototype, that is, the speaker can still make use of the bakery in a certain way.

Similarly, (4b) is acceptable if it is uttered by a mother (i.e. the speaker) asking her son (i.e. the addressee) whether there is a local bakery he can make use of or he is making use of. On the other hand, the sentence is judged to be unnatural if the speaker and the addressee are talking about what kinds of stores there are in the area they are going to visit on a trip. This difference in acceptability probably comes from the fact that while in the former scenario there is a relationship in which the addressee can make use of the bakery, in the latter no such relationship can be seen as holding.

2.2. Relations that have only responsibility

Sentences (5a) and (5b) can be used when the speaker points out to the addressee, who is entering a building with his dog, that the dog’s legs are dirty.

- (5) a. Tvůj pes má na tlapkách bláto.
 your.SG.NOM dog.SG.NOM have.3SG.PRS on leg.PL.LOC mud.SG.ACC
 ‘Your dog’s legs are dirty. (lit. Your dog has mud on its legs.)’
- b. Máš bláto na tlapkách tvého psa.
 have.2SG.PRS mud.SG.ACC on leg.PL.LOC your.SG.GEN dog.SG.GEN
 ‘Your dog’s legs are dirty. (lit. You have mud on your dog’s legs.)’

(5b) is judged less polite than (5a). The two are similar in that both denote a locative relation involving *mud* and *the dog’s legs*. They are, however, different in that while in (5a) the possessor of the *mud* is *your dog*, in (5b) it is *you*. We have seen that in the prototypical ownership relation, the possessor is held responsible for what happens to the possessee and this semantic feature is reflected in the contrast between the two examples. (5b) attributes the responsibility for there being mud on the dog’s legs to the addressee rather than the dog, which makes it sound less polite than (5a).

2.3. Relations that have only exclusiveness

The possessive construction can also encode a relationship between a subject and an object when the former has exclusive visual access to the latter.

- (6) a. Tak kde máš Jupiter, ukaž mi ho.
 so where have.2SG.PRS Jupiter.SG.ACC show.2SG.IMP 1SG.DAT 3SG.ACC
 ‘Now, where’s Jupiter (lit. Now, where do you have Jupiter), show it to me.’
- b. Mám tu hodně holubů.
 have.1SG.PRS here many pigeon.PL.GEN
 ‘There are a lot of pigeons here. (lit. I have a lot of pigeons here.)’

(6a) can be uttered by a father to his child who is looking at stars with a telescope. In this context, there is an exclusive relationship between the child and Jupiter in the sense that the speaker assumes that the child is observing Jupiter through the telescope, while he himself is not. Similarly, (6b) can be used when someone sitting on a park bench is talking to a friend on the phone while watching a lot of pigeons right in front of her. Here again, the relationship between the speaker and the pigeons is exclusive in the sense that she is the sole interlocutor who has visual access to the birds. Although these instances diverge from the prototypical ownership relation, where the subject has something at his/her disposal, they can still be expressed by possessive constructions probably because they can be construed as involving an exclusive relation between the subject and the object.

- c. Jupiter máš vedle Saturnu.
 Jupiter.SG.ACC have.2SG.PRS next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 ‘Jupiter is next to Saturn. (lit. You have Jupiter next to Saturn.)’
- d. Jupiter máte vedle Saturnu.
 Jupiter.SG.ACC have.2PL.PRS next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 ‘Jupiter is next to Saturn. (lit. You have Jupiter next to Saturn.)’

3.2. Restriction on tense

Possessive constructions lacking all features of ownership relations can only be used in the present tense, not in the past or future tense. To the question in (8a), which asks where Judith Bridge was located, one can answer with the past-tense existential construction in (8b), but not with the past-tense possessive construction in (8c). In the same way, to the question in (9a), which asks where a department store will be built, one can answer with the future-tense existential construction in (9b), but not with the future-tense possessive construction in (9c).

- (8) a. Kde byl Juditin most?
 where be.3SG.PST Judith.Bridge.SG.NOM
 ‘Where was Judith Bridge?’
- b. Byl v Praze tam, kde teď stojí Karlův most.
 be.3SG.PST inPrague.SG.LOC there where now stand.3SG.PRS Charles.bridge.SG.NOM
 ‘It was in Prague, in the place where there is Charles Bridge now.’
- c. *Měl jsi ho v Praze
 have.SG.PST AUX.2SG 3SG.ACC in Prague.SG.LOC
 tam, kde teď stojí Karlův most
 there where now stand.3SG.PRS Charles.bridge.SG.NOM
 Intended: ‘It was in Prague, in the place where there is Charles Bridge now.’
- (9) a. Kde bude v New Yorku ten obchodní dům?
 where be.3SG.FUT in New.York.SG.LOC that.SG.NOM department.store.SG.NOM
 ‘Where in New York will be the department store?’
- b. Bude na Manhattanu.
 be.3SG.FUT in Manhattan.SG.LOC
 ‘It will be in Manhattan.’

- c. *Budeš ho mít na Manhattanu.
 AUX.2SG.SG 3SG.ACC have.INF in Manhattan.SG.LOC
 Intended: ‘It will be in Manhattan.’

3.3. Restriction on sentence types

The possessive constructions with none of the features of ownership relations, moreover, can only be used in declarative sentences, not in interrogative sentences. For instance, one cannot ask where Jupiter is located with the possessive construction in (10a). The declarative negative sentence in (10b) is judged to be natural if the speaker assumes that the addressee believes that the planet has an atmosphere.

- (10) a. *Máš Jupiter vedle Saturnu?
 have.2SG.PRS Jupiter.SG.ACC next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 Intended: ‘Is Jupiter next to Saturn?’
- b. Na té planetě nemáš atmosféru.
 on that.SG.LOC planet.SG.LOC NEG.have.2SG.PRS atmosphere.SG.ACC
 ‘There is no atmosphere on the planet (lit. You don’t have atmosphere on the planet.)’

4. Where do these restrictions come from?

We have seen that the possessive constructions without any features of ownership relations have restrictions that are not imposed on possessive constructions expressing prototypical/peripheral ownership relations. Specifically, this type of possessive construction (i) has to have the second-person grammatical subject, (ii) has to be in the present tense, and (iii) cannot be used in interrogative sentences. Although where these restrictions come from still remains unclear, this last section points to some factors that may motivate the behavior of the possessive construction in question.

First, that this type of possessive construction cannot be used as interrogative sentence may indicate that it conveys the speaker’s belief that the locative relation expressed actually holds. As exemplified in (11b) and (11c), this type of possessive construction is judged to be unnatural if it occurs with expressions denoting a supposition or speculation on the part of the speaker. In other words, it is incompatible with expressions that do not commit the speaker to the existence of the locative relationship in reality. This could count as supporting evidence for the hypothesis above.

- (11) a. Jupiter je asi vedle Saturnu.
 Jupiter.SG.NOM be.3SG.PRS maybe next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 ‘Jupiter is maybe next to Saturn.’
- b. ??Jupiter máš asi vedle Saturnu.
 Jupiter.SG.ACC have.2SG.PRS maybe next.to Saturn.SG.GEN
 Intended: ‘Jupiter is maybe next to Saturn.’

- c. ??Nejsem si jistý, ale Jupiter máš
 NEG.COP.1SG.PRS REFL.DAT sure.SG.NOM but Jupiter.SG.ACC have.2SG.PRS

vedle Saturnu.

next.to Saturn.SG.GEN

Intended: ‘I’m not sure, but Jupiter is next to Saturn’.

As we have seen in section 3.1, this type of possessive construction is judged to be impolite if the addressee is someone the speaker should treat respectfully. This implies that the possessive construction in question conveys the speaker’s belief that the locative relation, which the speaker takes for granted, should be accepted by the addressee as one that holds in reality, though the addressee does not know or is not sure that it does. If so, it is not surprising that this type of possessive construction should sound impolite, as it implies the addressee’s ignorance. This type of possessive construction thus expresses an epistemic relationship between the addressee and something that the speaker believes should be accepted by the addressee as part of reality, motivating the use of the second person subject.

Now let us consider the restriction on tense, namely, the phenomenon where the opposition in tense is neutralized. This type of neutralization is also observable, for example, in performatives (e.g. *I promise I’ll pay you back*), imperatives (e.g. *Open your mouth wide*), and the deictic here/there construction in English (e.g. *Here comes the bus*). What they all have in common is that they express an event that unfolds in the situation of utterance, which implies that the possessive construction in question also expresses such an event. What is this event, specifically?

- (12) Tady máte recept.
 here have.2PL.PRS prescription.SG.ACC
 ‘Here is your prescription. (lit. Here you have prescription)’

Sentence (12) is an instance of the possessive construction, through the utterance of which the addressee comes into possession of the referent of the object (i.e. *her prescription*). In other words, it expresses an event occurring in the situation of utterance, where the addressee comes to possess the object. This makes the sentence a kind of performative. (In expressing only the state resulting from a speech act (cf. *You are fired!*), though, (12) is different from typical performatives that specify the agent of the speech act and the action carried out by her (e.g. *I promise...*).

Similarly, the possessive construction lacking all features of ownership relations can be characterized as a performative. Just as the utterance of (12) puts the object in the addressee’s sphere of control, the possessive construction in question puts an object involved in a locative relation in the addressee’s sphere of epistemic control. If this is correct, the possessive construction in question is a

kind of performative denoting an event occurring in the situation of utterance, and this is why tense is neutralized¹.

References

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¹ While a typical statement conveys that the speaker believes a proposition to be true and that she wants the addressee to accept it as true, it leaves up to the addressee to decide whether to accept the proposition as true. In uttering the possessive sentence in question, by contrast, the speaker states that the addressee accepts the proposition as true. In other words, it is the speaker that decides that the locative relation in question is accepted by the addressee as part of reality. This could be one of the factors that make this type of possessive sentence sound impolite.

「木星を持つ」とはどういうことか？

—意味が希薄化したチェコ語の所有文—

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キーワード：チェコ語 所有 位置関係 認識論的關係 不躰さ 遂行文

要旨

場所句を伴うチェコ語のHAVE型所有文は、位置関係とともに典型的な所有権関係を表現する。この文は、典型的な所有権関係に見られるいくつかの意味的特徴を欠く関係を表現しうるが、このような場合には、主語の人称、時制、文タイプに制約が見られる。これらの制約は、当該の文が、聞き手と所有物名詞句の指示対象間の認識論的關係を表現する、ある種の遂行文であると考えerことで自然な現象と見ることができる。

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