

Beyond external possession: Genitive and dative with locational nouns in Latvian

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The present article deals with the dative external possessor construction in Latvian. Attention is drawn to the widespread occurrence of this construction, extending to constructions with relational nouns practically functioning as adpositions. The carrying-over of the external possessor construction to what would otherwise be described as adpositional phrases creates certain problems for syntactic description. Emphasis is, however, on the semantic aspects. The features commonly associated with the external possessor construction, such as animacy, sentiency and affectedness, play no role here. It is suggested that the differences between the constructions with genitive and dative in spatial expressions with relational nouns are connected with the figure-ground configuration, the constructions with the dative serving to mark the shift of saliency from the figure (located object) to the ground (reference object). This, it is argued, is not an accidental extension of the external possessor construction to a domain where it was not originally applicable, but reflects the general principles underlying the external possessor construction. This can be formulated as the shifting of cognitive or discourse saliency from the figure/possessum to the ground/possessor in a locative/possessive structure.

Keywords: external possession, adpositional constructions, relational nouns, ground-figure relationship

0. Introduction

Like many other languages, Latvian has the so-called external possessor construction. External possessors are expressed by the dative, which is their typical realisation in most European languages (König 2001, 971). An interesting feature of Latvian is that in this language external possessors extend to constructions with locational (spatial) nouns to form different types of spatial expressions. In this way, the opposition of genitive and dative is transferred to what would normally be described as adpositional phrases. Such instances will be an object of special interest in this article. Havers, the author of the first comprehensive study of external possessor datives in Indo-European (Havers 1911),

formulated their distinguishing feature as ‘sympathetic participation of the possessor in a process’, hence the term *dativus sympatheticus*. More recently the construction has been described as reflecting the affectedness of the possessor (Haspelmath 1999, 112–115). It has also been emphasised that mental rather than physical affectedness must be involved (Haspelmath 1999, 112), and this, in turn, entails such features as animacy and sentiency. It is hard to see how such semantic features could apply to spatial constructions, the purpose of which is to characterise the relative location of objects. I will examine these spatial constructions in more detail in order to establish what kind of differences are associated with the genitive-dative alternation. The structure of the article is as follows. First, I will give a brief characterisation of the external possessor construction in Latvian. Next, I will discuss the specific features of the external possessor construction in locational expressions based on spatial nouns. The syntactic aspects of the external possessor construction in expressions with relational nouns will briefly be discussed in section 3. A case study of constructions with the noun *priekša* ‘front’ will prepare the ground for a discussion in which I will argue that the constructions with locational nouns afford important insights into the nature of the external possessor construction in general.

1. The external possessor construction in Latvian

In most European languages, the construction with an external possessor is subject to conditions of two kinds: the possessor must typically be animate, and the predicate must denote a dynamic process capable of affecting the possessor (this second condition is not universal, but seems to be characteristic especially of European languages, cf. König 2001, 976). Of the two Baltic languages, Lithuanian shows about the same restrictions as most of the European languages (cf. Kerevičienė 2004). Latvian, on the other hand, does not show such restrictions. First, the animacy restrictions are virtually non-existent: inanimates frequently occur in the external possessor construction, even though it is not excluded that a detailed investigation might reveal a preference for animate external possessors.

- (1) *Tūlīt šie atvēr-uš-i naud-as*
 at.once they open-PRTC.PST.ACT-NOM.PL.M money-GEN
lād-ei vāk-u un sāk-s naud-u skaitī-t.
 box-DAT cover-ACC and start-FUT.3 money-ACC COUNT-INF
 ‘They opened the lid of the money box straight away and
 there they go counting the money.’ (folk tale)

Secondly, there do not seem to be any notable restrictions with regard to the dynamicity of the predicate. This would also require a more detailed investigation, but it is not difficult to find instances of this construction with absolutely stative verbs not entailing affectedness of any kind; an example would be *zināt* ‘know’, e. g.

- (2) *Ell-a zināja nosaukum-us aug-iem un*
 PN-NOM know.PST.3 name-ACC.PL plant-DAT.PL and
radīb-ām.
 creature-DAT.PL
 ‘Ella knew the names of plants and (living) creatures.’ (Dzintars Sodums)

It has been noted that in the case of a verb like ‘see’, which strictly entails no impact on the object, the external possessor construction is enabled in some languages, but on condition that some kind of affectedness is implied, e. g., sexual harassment is suggested in Italian example (3), cited by König (2001, 976):

- (3) *Le ho visto le gamb-e.*
 3.SG.F.DAT have.PRS.1SG see.PST.PRTC DEF leg-PL
 ‘I saw her legs.’

This effect is not to be observed in Latvian; instead, the use of the external possessor construction with *redzēt* ‘see’ is associated with a shift of *redzēt* from immediate- perception predicate to acquisition-of-knowledge predicate (on these types of complement-taking predicates cf. Noonan 2007, 129–130, 142–144), and the dative possessor together with the object of *redzēt* acts as a kind of small clause—an interpretation no doubt favoured by the fact that *man ir* ‘mihi est’ is the construction for predicative possession in Latvian. As shown by example (4), the existence of the possessum is not presupposed in this case, whereas this is a typical feature of the external possessor construction proper:

- (4) *Veikalniekam pie tramvaj-a piestātn-es*
shopkeeper-DAT.SG near tram-GEN.SG stop-GEN.SG
redzēj-u vesel-u kaudz-i ar tukš-ām
see-PST.1SG whole-ACC.SG heap-ACC.SG with empty-DAT.PL
augļ-u kast-ēm.
fruit-GEN.PL box-DAT.PL
‘I saw the shopkeeper near the tram stop had a whole heap
of empty fruit boxes.’ (Irma Grebzde)

Another illustration of the lack of conditions on dynamicity of the predicate in Latvian is the use of the external possessor in copular constructions, which would be impossible in Lithuanian:

- (5) [..] *ac-is viņ-ai par maz-ām*
eye-NOM.PL 3-DAT.SG.F too small-DAT.PL.F
un vaig-i pārāk apaļ-i.
and cheek-NOM.PL too round-NOM.PL
‘Her eyes are too small and her cheeks too round.’ (Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš)

Copular constructions with external possessors are often syntactically ambiguous, as the dative with *būt* is also the construction used for predicative possession in Latvian; it would be possible to take *apaļi vaigi* ‘round cheeks’ as a discontinuous constituent in a possessive clause *viņai (ir) pārāk apaļi vaigi* ‘She has too round cheeks’. The first part of example (5), however, provides proof that this is actually a copular construction. The construction *par mazām* can be used only in predicative position, never adnominally (in contradistinction to the construction with *pārāk*, which can also be used adnominally), so that the construction can only be copular. In Holvoet (2005) attention is drawn to the ambiguity of such constructions between predicative and external possession in Russian and Latvian and between attributive and predicative constructions in Lithuanian; the existence of an emergent construction type referring to an attribute as a means of characterising a person is pointed out. In this case the external possessor construction is given a new rationale: a constitutive feature of the characterising construction is that the attribute used in characterising a person is presupposed (very often inalienable possession is involved); the purpose of the construction is only to assign a certain value to this attribute

(eye-colour, for example) as a means of characterisation. The predicative possession construction, in which the possessum is usually a new element in information structure, does not inherently suit this purpose; the external possessor construction, applied to a copular structure, suits it much better in that it has the possessum (the attribute) in subject position, which coincides with the default topic. A precondition for this development is, of course, that the conditions on dynamicity of the predicate are relaxed and the construction becomes accessible for copular structures. A similar development can be observed in Russian¹.

Quite often, the only reason for using the dative instead of the genitive seems to be the fact that the genitive can occur only in prenominal position, whereas the position of the external possessor is, of course, free. This is particularly convenient in the case of heavier constructions, with the possessor noun accompanied by a postmodifier:

- (6) *Tā sauc-a piekt-o stāv-u kād-am*
 so call-PST.3 fifth-ACC.SG floor-ACC.SG some-DAT.SG.M
nam-am Todlēben-a bulvār-ī pretim
 house-DAT.SG PN-GEN boulevard-LOC.SG vis-à-vis
Strēlniek-u dārz-am.
 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)

In the case of a postmodifier intervening between the possessor and its head, the adnominal genitive is occasionally replaced with a possessive dative that, in the absence of a verb that could licence it even in the broadest sense, no longer seems to satisfy the conditions for being called an external possessor and is virtually adnominal:

¹ The structural ambiguity of Russian constructions like *Glaza u nee zelenye* has already been noted by Gustavsson (1976, 340–341). In Russian, the constructions with an external possessor encoded by *u* + GEN (unlike those with the dative) are not subject to constraints with regard to the dynamicity of the predicate (as pointed out by Garde 1985, who analyses both constructions in detail), and it could therefore be said to be functionally closer to the dative Latvian external possessor construction than the Russian dative external possessor construction is. The shift from perception to knowledge acquisition predicate may be observed in the Russian construction with *u* + GEN as well.

- (7) *Tas, protams, jā-dara privāti, neoficiāli, vislabāk*
 that of course DEB-do in private unofficially preferably
sarun-ā vīr-am ar vīr-u, jo atklātīb-ā
 talk-LOC.SG man-DAT.SG with man-ACC.SG for publicity-LOC
tād-as liet-as ne-var cilā-t.
 such-ACC.PL thing-ACC.PL NEG-can.PRS.3SG raise-INF
 ‘This, of course, must be done in private, unofficially, preferably in a man-to-man talk, for such things may not be brought to public attention.’ (Augusts Deglavs)

Such adnominal uses are, however, marginal and always subject to specific syntactic conditions, as shown in (7), where the dative becomes part of the complex postmodifier *vīram ar vīru* ‘man-to-man’. As is known, the reanalysis of external possessor datives occasionally leads to the rise of adnominal possessive datives, as in the colloquial German construction *dem Bürgermeister seine Briefmarken* ‘the mayor’s stamps’ (Heine 1997, 183–184), but this has not (yet) happened in Standard Latvian. It is, however, reported from the Livonian dialects of Latvian, where it seems to be connected with the phonetic loss of genitival endings. An instance of this can be seen in (8), taken from Endzelins (1951, 575).

- (8) *Dēl-s valķe tēv-am cepur.*
 son-NOM.SG wear.PRS.3SG father-DAT.SG cap.ACC.SG
 ‘The son wears his father’s cap.’

In Standard Latvian, the dative possessor has not become adnominal, so that the defining feature of the external possessor construction has remained intact. Its effect is to create an extra clausal constituent entering a direct relationship to the verb. In sentences like (2) or (6) the possibility of obtaining a more flexible word order seems to be a motivation for its use, but this is not a constant feature: in (1), the position of the adnominal genitive would have been exactly the same as that of the dative that was actually used. But even if word order is not affected, there may be subtle differences in information structure. As a result of the extraction of the possessor from the noun phrase to which the possessum belongs, possessor and possessum can occupy more clearly differentiated positions in information structure. In (1), the external possessor construction introduces a subordinate theme:

the characters in the story (main theme) did something with the box (main rheme); what they did with the box (subordinate theme) was to open its lid (subordinate rheme)². By contrast, the construction with an internal possessor is insufficiently articulated as by default it would assign rhematic status to the whole object NP. I will argue further on that the increase in the degree of articulation of the clause in terms of topic-comment structure is an important aspect of the external possessor construction. But first I will discuss constructions with relational nouns.

2. Constructions with relational nouns

What I want to examine in more detail here is the way in which the competition between genitive and dative has been carried over to adpositional expressions with relational nouns (also called ‘location nouns’ or ‘relator nouns’, cf. Blake 2001, 15–16)³.

Latvian makes extensive use of prepositions to express spatial relations, but this system of prepositions is supplemented by constructions based on spatial nouns like *priekša* ‘front’, *apakša* ‘underneath’, *vidus* ‘middle’ etc. In certain cases, the constructions based on relational nouns are the only ones available; modern standard Latvian has, for example, no preposition meaning ‘before’ or ‘in front of’; instead, a construction with *priekša* ‘front’ must be used. In static locational function, nouns like this occur in the locative case, which is properly an inessive, prototypically denoting location inside a reference object. This inessive also serves as an illative case, as Latvian usually fails to mark the difference between locative (place) and lative (goal) expressions. Ablative (source) meaning is carried by the preposition *no*, and perlative (path) meaning can be conveyed by *pa*. A complete microsystem of spatial expressions built around a locational noun, in this case *vidus* ‘middle’, is illustrated in examples (9)–(12). It comprises four members: locative (9), lative (10), ablative (11) and perlative (12):

² This analysis of the ‘layered’ topic-comment structure of the sentence is based mainly on Bogusławski (1977).

³ The term ‘relational noun’ is somewhat ambiguous, as it has a different, more general meaning in Cognitive Grammar (cf. Langacker 1991, 38, 204). Although certain notions from Cognitive Grammar will be invoked further on, the term will here be used in the meaning known from typological literature, to refer to nouns performing an adpositional-like function.

- (9) *Skatītāj-u vid-ū daudz ārzemj-u*
 spectator-GEN.PL middle-LOC many foreign.countries-GEN
tūrist-u, kuri fotografē, filmē
 tourist-GEN.PL REL-NOM.SG.M photograph.PRS.3 film.PRS.3
un aplaudē mūziķ-iem.
 and applaud.PRS.3 musician-DAT.PL
 ‘Among the audience there are many foreign tourists, who photograph, film and applaud the musicians.’ www.laikraksts.com › Raksti › Arhīvs
- (10) *Šajā, trešajā, reiz-ē jau skatuv-e*
 DEM-LOC.SG third-LOC.SG time-LOC.SG already scene-NOM
un zāl-e tiek sapludinā-t-as ne tikai
 and hall-NOM AUX fuse-PRTC.PASS-NOM.PL.F not.only
emocij-ās, mūziķ-i iejūk
 emotion-LOC.PL musician-NOM.PL merge.PRS.3
skatītāj-u vid-ū.
 spectator-GEN.PL middle-LOC
 ‘This third time the scene and the audience are fused together not only emotionally, the musicians merge among the audience.’ jzfoto.blogiem.lv/?skip=50
- (11) *Beigās š-i vēstījum-a patiesum-u*
 finally DEM-GEN.SG.M account-GEN.SG accuracy-ACC
apliecināj-a brīvprātīg-ais no
 testify-PST.3 voluntary-NOM.SG.M.DEF from
skatītāj-u vid-us.
 spectator-GEN.PL middle-GEN
 ‘Finally the accuracy of this account was confirmed by a volunteer from amongst the audience.’ www.studija.lv/?parent=2936
- (12) *Ja gar ceļ-u ir krūm-i, ej-iet*
 if along road-ACC.SG be.PRS.3 bush-NOM.SG go-IMP.2PL
pa iel-as vid-u.
 by street-GEN.SG middle-ACC
 ‘If there are bushes along the road, walk in the middle of the street.’ spogulis.calis.lv/tava.../pasaizsardziba-uz-ielas

Though in the case of Latvian these relational nouns are assisted by case endings and prepositions proper, the claim that these nouns are used adpositionally seems nonetheless justified: it is based on the fact that these nouns have no typical nominal reference. In (12) the middle of the street is not an autonomous discourse referent and the noun is used only as a means of expressing the spatial relationship between a located object (the moving person) and a reference object (the street as a whole).

It is quite common for new prepositions to be created out of nouns with a spatial meaning. Often this process is attended by formal changes such as truncation, as illustrated by Latvian *priekš* (now obsolete in its original meaning ‘in front of’), undoubtedly derived from a case form (presumably the locative) of the noun *priekša* ‘front’ (Endzelin 1905, 185 = 1971, 485), and *apakš* ‘under’ (also obsolete), similarly derived from the noun *apakša* ‘underneath, space under something’ (Endzelin 1905, 32 = 1971, 339). Apart from truncation these two prepositions also show syntactic concomitants of their shift to adpositional status: whereas adnominal genitives are consistently preposed in Latvian, these two adpositions are placed before the noun, which suggests the case forms on which they are based (presumably the locative *priekšā*, *apakšā*) could precede the noun when occurring in adpositional function. This is actually attested in the case of *vidū* ‘amidst, amongst’ (Endzelin 1905, 200 = 1971, 499), the only one among the spatial nouns discussed here also to have developed into a preposition without changing its phonetic shape. It is sporadically attested in modern texts:

- (13) *Viņ-am nemaz vairs ne-kāroj-ā-s*
 3-DAT.SG.M not.in.the.least any.more NEG-crave-PST.3-REFL
bū-t vid-ū ļauž-u.
 be-INF middle-LOC people-GEN.PL
 ‘He didn’t wish to be among people at all any more.’ (Dagnija Zigmonte)

This is, by the way, the standard way of creating new noun-based prepositions in Lithuanian. The locative *vidury* (a shortened form of *viduryje*) is regularly preposed to the noun and thus practically functions as an adposition (it is described as such in LKŽ). In Lithuanian, where preposition of the adnominal genitive is not an absolute rule but merely a strong tendency (which can be overruled by factors of

information structure, practical difficulties with preposing heavy modifiers etc.) there is no clear-cut line of division between noun and noun-based adposition.

- (14) *O vidur-y kiem-o manau reikē-tu*
 and middle-LOC courtyard-GEN I think be.needed-COND.3
k-o graž-esni-o, bet ne-žinau
 something-GEN pretty-COMP-GEN but NEG-KNOW.PRS.1SG
k-o.
 what-GEN
 ‘In the middle of the courtyard we need [to plant] something
 prettier, I think, but I don’t know what.’ [www.rojaussodai.
 lt/forumas/viewtopic.php?f...](http://www.rojaussodai.lt/forumas/viewtopic.php?f...)

In Latvian, however, this device has been used to a limited extent only: *vidū* has basically retained its noun-like syntax, as in examples (9)–(12); and *priekš* and *apakš* have become obsolete, yielding to the competition of the non-truncated locatives *priekšā* and *apakšā*, which have retained their noun-like syntactic properties and are never employed prepositionally: **priekšā mājas* ‘in front of the house’ and **apakšā galvas* ‘under the head’ are now impossible, though they must historically underly the prepositions *priekš* and *apakš*.

Functionally, constructions with relational nouns like *priekša*, *apakša* etc. now behave like adpositional phrases. Syntactically, they have retained most of the features of noun-like behaviour and only occasionally display formal features betraying their adpositional status. An instance of noun-like behaviour would be their use with possessive pronouns rather than with a 1st or 2nd singular personal pronoun or reflexive pronoun:

- (15) *Man-ā priekš-ā stāv div-us*
 POSS-LOC.SG front-LOC stand.PRS.3 two-ACC.PL.M
metr-us gar-š, sportisk-s un
 metre-ACC.PL tall-NOM.SG.M athletic-NOM.SG.M and
spēcīg-s vīriet-is.
 sturdy-NOM.SG.M man-NOM.SG
 ‘An athletic and sturdy man, two metres tall, is standing in
 front of me.’ [smilsuterapija.1w.lv/310-mezonigais-virietis-
 i-dala](http://smilsuterapija.1w.lv/310-mezonigais-virietis-i-dala)

- (16) *Vai mās-as sav-ā starp-ā*
 Q sister-NOM.PL POSS.REFL-LOC.SG interstice-LOC.SG
strīdas biež-āk kā brāļ-i?
 quarrel.PRS.3 often-COMP than brother-NOM.PL
 ‘Do sisters quarrel among themselves more often than brothers?’ irc.lv/.../Vai_māsas_savā_starpā_strīdas_biežāk_kā_brāļi?...

Such expressions, reminiscent of English *on my behalf* (alongside *on behalf of me*), attest to the nominal properties of *priekša* and *starpā*, whereas English *in front of me* (rather than **in my front*) shows that *in front of* has advanced further on the cline towards prepositional status. However, constructions with *manis*, *tevis*, *sevis*, the genitives of the 1st and 2nd person singular personal pronouns and the reflexive pronoun, also occur, though this could be subject to certain conditions which would have to be investigated separately. Coordination with a genitive seems to be one of the factors favouring the use of the genitive instead of the possessive pronoun, though it does not block the use of the latter:

- (17) *Vain-as izjūt-a— vain-a sev-is un cit-u*
 guilt-GEN feeling-NOM guilt-NOM REFL-GEN and other-GEN.PL
cilvēk-u priekš-ā par t-o, kas
 person-GEN.PL front-LOC for DEM-ACC what.NOM
nav padarī-t-s vai nav
 be.NEG.PRS.3 do-PRTC.PASS-NOM.SG.M OR be.NEG.PRS.3
paspē-t-s.
 be.in.time-PRTC.PASS-NOM.SG.M
 ‘The feeling of guilt—guilt before oneself and other people for what one has not done or has not done in time.’ psihe.lv/45-emocionala-izdegsana/
- (18) *Laik-s pielik-t punkt-u vain-as sajūt-ai*
 time-NOM.SG add-INF stop-ACC guilt-GEN feeling-DAT
sav-ā un cit-u priekš-ā.
 POSS.REFL-LOC.SG and other-GEN.PL front-LOC
 ‘It’s time to put a stop to this feeling of guilt before oneself and other people.’ www.saulesjosta.lv/modules.php?...3879

Another nominal feature of relationally employed spatial nouns is that the nouns depending on them retain the ability to appear in two forms, genitive and dative. If we conceive of prepositions as typically governing some case if a language has a case system, then this type of behaviour could be called atypical: one would expect the genitive to cease behaving as an adnominal modifier (alternating with an external possessive dative) and to acquire the behaviour of an adpositional complement. This is what has happened in the constructions underlying the prepositional phrases with *priekš* and *apakš*, which now consistently contain genitives. The non-truncated *priekšā*, on the other hand, is used in two ways: with a preposed genitive (19) or with a dative whose position relative to the spatial noun is free (20). As meaning differences associated with this will be dealt with further on, I will just illustrate this, for the time being, with two constructed examples without pausing at the semantic differences.

(19) *Viņ-š stāvēja durvj-u priekš-ā.*
3-NOM.SG.M stand.PST.3 door-GEN front-LOC

(20) *Viņ-š stāvēja durv-īm priekš-ā / priekš-ā*
3-NOM.SG.M stand.PST.3 door-DAT front-LOC front-LOC
durv-īm.
door-DAT
'He was standing in front of the door.'

In the case of perlocative expressions illustrated in (12), the effect of the external possessor construction is to extract the noun denoting the reference object from the bracket structure formed by the preposition and the relational noun, cf. (21) and (22):

(21) *Veln-s nāc-is no Zviedrijas*
devil-NOM.SG.M come-PRTC.ACT.NOM.SG.M from.Sweden
līdz Dundagai pa jūr-as apakš-u.
till.Dundaga by sea-GEN underneath-ACC
'The Devil is said to have walked from Sweden to Dundaga underneath the sea.' (Teodors Zeiferts)

(22) *Pa apakš-u iez-īm gar paš-u ūden-s*
by underneath-ACC rock-DAT.SG along very-ACC water-GEN

mal-u gāja šaur-a dzeg-īņ-a.
 edge-ACC go.PST.3 narrow-NOM.SG.F ledge-DIM-NOM.SG
 ‘A narrow ledge ran underneath the rock along the very edge
 of the water.’ (Anšlavs Eglītis)

This lends the whole spatial construction a dichotomous structure: *jūrai | pa apakšu* or *pa apakšu | jūrai*. Maybe there is a motivation for this in terms of information structure: it may be convenient in cases where the speaker needs to place the relational noun and its complement at opposite sides of the topic-comment boundary, e. g., in cases of contrastive focus. However, this cannot be the only motivation. If it were, there would probably be no differences between the constructions with individual relational nouns. Actually, the ‘extraction’ from the adpositional bracket is sometimes possible, in other cases impossible and in still other cases obligatory. Extraction does not seem to occur in the case of *no ... priekšas* ‘from [the place] in front of’ (23) but is obligatory in the case of *pa priekšu* ‘ahead of’ (24):

(23) *Vis-a problēm-a, ka mēs*
 whole-NOM.SG.F problem-NOM.SG that 1PL.NOM
es-am pārāk izlepuš-i, ka mums
 be-PRS.1PL too spoiled-NOM.PL.M that 1PL.DAT
vaig lai mūs aizved no
 be.needed.PRS.3 that 1PL.ACC convey.PRS.3 from
māj-as priekš-as līdz darb-a viet-as durv-īm!
 house-GEN front-GEN till work-GEN place-GEN door-DAT
 ‘The whole problem is that we are too spoiled, we want
 somebody to transport us from in front of our house to our
 workplace.’ www.bauskaszive.lv/forum/posts.html?fid...

(24) *Toties maz-i pusaudž-i kā*
 instead small-NOM.PL adolescent-NOM.PL like
herold-i steidzās muzikant-iem pa priekš-u.
 herald-NOM.PL haste.PST.3 musician-DAT.PL by front-ACC
 ‘Instead, tiny adolescents marched ahead of the musicians
 like heralds.’ (Kārlis Zariņš)

I will argue further on that the use of the dative in (24) is semantically motivated. If, for semantic reasons, the construction with the dative

is selected, an automatic consequence of this will be the extraction of the reference noun from the adpositional bracket, as a prepositional phrase like *pa priekšu* forms a close-knit unit, the continuity of which may be disrupted only by a genitival modifier of the relational noun *priekša*. Changes in word order are thus a side-effect of a semantically driven variation rather than a self-sufficient motivation.

3. Syntactic aspects

The question could be posed at this point whether in both cases—in constructions with the genitive and with the dative—we are entitled to speak of adpositional phrases. If the genitive is used, we clearly are: as there is no clear boundary between an adposition-like noun and an adposition, we can suffice with saying that *durvju priekšā* functions as an adpositional phrase. If the dative is used, there is, strictly speaking, no phrase, adpositional or other. The defining feature of the external possessor construction is that ‘a possessive modifier does not occur as a dependent constituent of the modified NP, but NP-externally as a constituent of the clause’ (Haspelmath 1999, 109). In a dependency based framework, we could posit that the dative in (20) is governed (syntactically) by the adpositionally used noun, though adjacency is not required in this case. Actually this solution is also the most obvious one for the relational adverbs termed ‘semi-prepositions’ (*pusprievārdi*) in Latvian grammar (Bergmane *et al.*, eds., 722–723; the notion of ‘semi-prepositions’ is vigorously disputed by Lagzdīņa 1998, whose term ‘relational adverbs’ I here adopt). These are consistently used with the dative but have no regular position with regard to them and may also be separated from them, as in (25):

- (25) *Negaidot* *log-am* *pagāj* *garām*
 unexpectedly window-DAT walk.by.PST.3 past
vien-a *no pirmītēj-ām* *jaunav-ām*.
 one-NOM.SG.F of of.a.moment.ago-DAT.PL young.lady-DAT.PL
 ‘Suddenly one of the two young ladies of a moment ago
 walked past the window.’ (Kārlis Zariņš)

An alternative way of looking at this construction would be to say that *paiet garām* ‘walk by’ is actually a kind of phrasal verb govern-

ing, as a whole, a noun in the dative. A similar interpretation could be suggested for constructions with relational nouns like *priekšā*. For (19) and (20) we could suggest syntactic interpretations like (26) and (27) respectively:

(26) *stāvēja* [*durvj-u* *priekšā*]
stand.PST.3 door-GEN front-LOC

(27) [*stāvēja* *priekšā*] *durvīm*
stand.PST.3 front-LOC door-DAT

Whether operating with such a phrasal verb is an attractive option or not will, of course, depend on the semantic properties of the verb. The phrasal interpretation suggests itself for motion verbs, whereas it would be problematical with most stative verbs, cf. (28) and (29):

(28) *Viņ-i* *iet* *pāri* *iel-ai*.
3-NOM.PL.M go.PRS.3 across street-DAT
'They cross (walk across) the street.'

(29) *Viņ-i* *dzīvo* *pāri* *iel-ai*.
3-NOM.PL.M live.PRS.3 across street-DAT
'They live across the street.'

It is obvious that *walk across* will be a better candidate for a phrasal verb than **live across*, which is not a very likely lexical item⁴. There seems to be a particularly close syntactic tie with the verb in cases where the relational noun or adverb correlates with a preverb, as shown in (30), where the preverb *aiz-* in combination with *priekšā* conveys the idea of something being covered from the eye or screened—a meaning this preverb can never have without the co-occurring *priekšā*:

(30) *Pirm-ais,* *k-o* *viņ-a,*
first-NOM.SG.M.DEF what-ACC 3-NOM.SG.F
ienāk-usi *istab-ā* *izdarija,*
come.in-PRTC.ACT.PST.NOM.SG.F room-LOC do.PST.3

⁴ The difference is also reflected in word order: when *pāri* occurs with a verb like *dzīvot* 'live' in the meaning 'at the other side of', its behaviour is preposition-like and it will not be separated from its noun; with verbs of motion, all types of relative positioning are possible.

aiz-vilka *log-am* *priekš-ā* *aizkar-u.*
 PVB-draw.PST.3 window-DAT front-LOC curtain-ACC
www.staburags.lv/portals/interesanti/raksts.html?
 ‘The first thing she did upon entering the room was to draw
 the curtain before the window.’

The use of the dative with relational adverbs and their ability to govern complements at a distance are strikingly similar to the pattern we find with relational nouns, and the similarity is probably not a coincidence. One would expect an adverb acquiring adpositional function to assume a fixed position with regard to its complement; this has actually occurred, e. g., in the case of *caur* ‘through’, which has arisen from truncation of the adverb *cauri* ‘throughout, through and through’ (Endzelin 1905, 68 = 1971, 373), and has become a preposition governing the accusative, while the non-truncated *cauri* continues to function as a relational adverb. The distant positioning of the complement with relational adverbs suggests that their syntactic properties have undergone the analogy of the external possessor constructions with spatial nouns. The choice of the case form points to the same conclusion. When used as a preposition, Lithuanian *kiaurai* (the etymological and semantic equivalent of Latvian *cauri*) governs either the accusative (evidently on the analogy of the near-synonymous *per*) or the genitive, which is the default relational case governed by many new prepositions of nominal or adverbial origin (for a brief discussion of the genitive with prepositions cf. Berg-Olsen 2005, 160–162). The dative governed by its Latvian counterpart is unexpected and, in combination with the distant positioning, strongly suggestive of influence on the part of the external possessor construction.

The Latvian spatial expressions based on relational nouns are a problem for syntactic description. It may be difficult to decide whether a noun has been reanalysed as an adposition or not, but once we have opted for the adpositional analysis, the syntactic description is straightforward as long as there is a relation of contiguity. If there is not, the problem may be unsolvable in the framework of phrase structure syntax.

The syntactic implications of the phenomena under discussion are highly complex, but they are a topic for a separate investigation. They had to be mentioned in the context of this article because the question might be posed whether the genitive-dative alternation which I am

going to discuss in detail in the following section really operates in similar syntactic contexts and whether we are comparing things that can be compared. In the discussion that follows I will mainly refer to cases where both constructions are used with the same verb *būt* 'be', occasionally also other stative verbs that could hardly be expected to form phrasal verbs with the relational noun.

What will interest me here is the semantic aspect of the genitive-dative alternation. Whatever our syntactic interpretation will be, the link between the construction illustrated in (20) and the external possessor construction is beyond doubt. In the external possessor construction the clausal constituent status of the possessor is associated with semantic effects, formulated in terms of affectedness. That is why restrictions arise on the semantic type of predicates licencing the external possessor construction: the notion of affectedness must be somehow compatible with the meaning of the verb, even if the possessor phrase is not strictly an argument of the clausal predicate. In the case of the constructions with relational nouns discussed here, we can imagine two possible situations with regard to the interaction between the verb and the dative NP. As shown by examples (28) and (29) (*mutatis mutandis*, for these sentences contain relational adverbs rather than relational nouns), the relation to the verb will be close in some instances but loose in others: it will be rather close in 'put before/in front of' but quite loose in 'comb one's hair in front of'. At least in a considerable number of instances the link between the dative NP and the verb will be quite loose, and the notion of affectedness will presumably not play a very considerable role in the choice of the construction. Besides, the nouns providing the reference objects for the spatial constructions will quite often be inanimate, which also renders the involvement of affectedness rather improbable.

In the following sections I will pose the question what kind of differences are associated with the genitive-dative alternation with relational spatial nouns. We will start from a case-study, that of spatial expressions with *priekšā*, to proceed with more general conclusions.

4. A case study: *priekšā*

I will illustrate the semantic differences between the genitive and dative constructions using the example of *priekšā* 'before, in front of'.

- (33) *Vien-ām ragav-ām priekš-ā sirķ-is, otr-ām*
 one-DAT.PL sleigh-DAT.PL front-LOC grey-NOM other-DAT.PL
baltīņ-š.
 white.horse-NOM
 ‘A grey is harnessed to one sleigh and a white horse to the other.’ (Valentīns Jakobsons)

Not all uses of the dative prompt the interpretation of the local relationship as causing obstruction, or of a functional relation. For an animate noun, the dative implies perception of the figure by a person as belonging to his personal sphere, as being relevant in finding his bearings etc.:

- (34) *Arī Ingrid-ai priekš-ā bija pusizdzert-a*
 also PN-DAT front-LOC be.PST.3 half.emptied-NOM.SG.F
glāz-e.
 glass-NOM.SG
 ‘Ingrid also had a half-emptied glass before her.’ (Anšlavs Eglītis)
- (35) *Man priekš-ā ir Materhorn-s, bet*
 1SG.DAT front-LOC be.PRS.3 Matterhorn-NOM but
aizmugur-ē Gorner-a ledāj-s.
 back-LOC Gorner-GEN glacier-NOM
 ‘I have the Matterhorn in front of me and the Gorner Glacier behind me.’ www.poga.lv/photos/qwerty/photo:268563/links/?...

The English translations of (34) and (35) contain the verb *have*, and the question could actually be posed whether the original Latvian sentences are not also based on the possessive construction *man ir* ‘mihi est’ (‘x has y before him/her’) rather than on a locational construction (‘y is before x’). Syntactically, the difference would consist in that on the ‘locational’ interpretation the dative *Ingridai* in (34) would be governed by *priekšā* or, if one prefers, by a phrasal verb of the type *būt priekšā* ‘be in front of’, whereas on the possessive interpretation *priekšā* would be purely adverbial and could not be said to govern the dative. Examples like (30) show that the dative is also possible when *priekšā* is combined with verbs other than ‘be’, so that there is

no compelling reason to regard (34) and (35) as instantiations of the predicative possessive construction *man ir* ‘mihi est’. Thus, even if the two constructions overlap and it is occasionally difficult to say with which of the two we are dealing, we are still entitled to examine the effects associated with the use of the dative with *priekšā* without having to assume that these have been in some way carried over from the predicative possessive construction.

Not surprisingly, the configuration illustrated in (34) and (35) can receive a temporal instead of a spatial interpretation. The ‘located object’ may be an event awaiting a person; again, the person looking into the future constitutes the vantage point from which the (temporal) situation is viewed.

- (36) *Vēl man priekš-ā ir vann-as*
 still 1SG.DAT front-LOC be.PRS.3 bath-GEN.SG
istab-as flizēšan-a.
 room-GEN.SG tiling-NOM
 ‘The tiling of the bathroom is still ahead of me.’
 cojs.raksta.lv/2010/03/28/remontejos

And finally, the dative is always used with the idea of a person outdistancing other persons moving in the same direction:

- (37) *Izrādās, es nemaz ne-esmu*
 turn.out.PRS.3 1SG.NOM not.in.the.least NEG-be.PRS.1SG
pats gudr-āk-ais — man priekš-ā ir
 very clever-COMP-NOM.SG.M.DEF 1SG.DAT front-LOC be.PRS.3
cit-i skrējēj-i.
 other-NOM.PL.M runner-NOM.PL
 www.noskrien.lv/kalifornijas-piedzivojumi-maratonista-
 gauma-nobeigums
 ‘It turns out that I am by no means the cleverest—other runners are ahead of me.’

It seems reasonable to assume that the idea of outdistancing others can be expressed by *priekšā* only if viewed from the vantage point of those lagging behind: the relation of being ‘before’ or ‘in front of’ is, of course, symmetrical in the case of two persons (or objects) facing each other, but not in the case of two runners moving in the same direction.

It follows that (37) is an instance of the same conceptualisation also illustrated in (34), (35).

The presence of a human (or, at any rate, sentient) participant consciously perceiving the situation and thereby introducing a specific perspectivisation of it therefore seems to be crucially involved in (34)–(37). But the element of conscious perception interpreted, in other cases, as a form of affectedness, cannot explain all the meaning differences observable between constructions with the genitive and the dative. An interesting case is that of the metaphorical use of *priekšā* with reference to persons witnessing a public treatment, behaviour etc. of another person:

- (38) *Ciet-uš-ais* *jūtas*
 suffer-PRTC.ACT.PST-NOM.SG.M.DEF feel.PRS.3SG.REFL
apkauno-t-s *un*
 shame-PRTC.PASS.PST-NOM.SG.M and
pazemo-t-s *vis-as*
 humiliate-PRTC.PASS.PST-NOM.SG.M whole-GEN.SG.F
pasaul-es *priekšā.*
 world-GEN.SG front-LOC
 ‘The victim feels shamed and humiliated before the whole world.’ (Pāvils Rozītis)

The ignominy suffered by the subject is described by *priekšā* as being perceived and judged by the lookers-on. One would perhaps expect the dative to be used if conscious perception of the goings-on is requisite (as it evidently is here), but the situation is, nevertheless, viewed from the vantage point of the person whose moral character is surrendered to public scrutiny and who feels put to shame and humiliated. Affectedness in the sense of conscious perception is involved on both sides and will not help us much further here. We must also comment on another possible sense of the feature of affectedness: that of an event having ‘significant consequences’ for the participant concerned (this property is taken as the distinguishing semantic feature of the external possessor construction in Mirjam Fried’s constructional approach, cf. Fried 2009). Once again, this feature is present in some instances but cannot explain all the spatial uses of *priekšā*: with reference to (37), we could pose the question who experiences more significant consequences—the person who is outdistanced or the person outdistancing others.

We must therefore bear in mind that the whole expression used in (38) is a metaphorical use of a certain type of spatial expression and derives its specific metaphorical meaning from the spatial conceptualisation of the scene. This spatial conceptualisation involves a figure and a ground. In the normal case—that is to say, if the spatial expression is really used with the aim of saying something about the location of the located object—the situation is viewed from the vantage point of the figure. As soon as the actual aim is to say something about the situation of the reference object, this perspective is reversed. Now in example (38) the metaphorical use of *priekšā* is obviously in full conformity with the prototypical figure-ground relation. The position of a person with regard to the witnesses judging his or her moral character can obviously be compared to that of the ground with regard to which a figure is located (the local character of the English idiom *put to shame* leaps to the eye). In this sense, the metaphorical use illustrated in (38) invokes the proper, or prototypical, configuration of figure and ground.

One special application of the figure-ground (or trajector-landmark) relationship, according to Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2000, 171–202), is the reference point construction that underlies the possessive construction. The head of a possessive construction is identified through association with a (more familiar) reference point. In a way, it is located with regard to this reference point. If the model is carried over to spatial constructions with relational nouns, the genitive must, in conformity with the general principle, be the ground used to locate the figure. The figure must also be the vantage point from which this location is described. In the construction with the dative, one or more elements of this normal configuration are cancelled. In sentences like (32) and (33), perspective is not really relevant, but the element of location is absent, as the aim is to characterise the situation of the object functioning as ground. In (37), the idea of ‘being ahead of others’ is a kind of location, but as this relation can be expressed by *priekšā* only if the situation is observed from the vantage point of those outdistanced, the perspective is anomalous. Probably for the same reason, the use of the dative and extraction from the circumpositional structure is obligatory with *pa priekšu* illustrated in (24)⁵.

⁵ *Priekšā* and *pa priekšu* are clearly opposed in meaning: *pa priekšu* is used of a situation in which two persons or objects are moving in the same direction, and therefore combines

5. Beyond external possession

Though affectedness is probably the feature most frequently invoked in dealing with external possession, it has also been suggested that more general aspects of the construal of events and situations may be involved, of the same kind as those in voice alternations. Payne & Barshi (1999, 20–22) discuss some of the proposals hitherto advanced. Some of them are not general enough as they still crucially involve sentience; this is the case with Velázquez-Castillo's suggestion (1999, 105) that external possession involves “perspectivisation of a prominent sentient P(ossessor) which is empathetically linked to the speaker”. Empathy is probably the principle underlying the animacy constraint characteristic of external possessor constructions in many European languages, but in order to capture the extensions we observe, for instance, in Latvian, the explanation we offer for the external possessor construction itself should probably reflect more abstract principles of structure, and should not invoke animacy or sentience. The figure-ground relationship has been claimed to underlie fundamental aspects of sentence structure in Cognitive Linguistics (cf. Talmy 2000, 311–344) and more specifically in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 231–236). But one would like to be more specific about the elements and mechanisms of linguistic structure involved in the external possession construction. Among the explanations proffered so far those invoking information structure and discourse saliency seem most convincing. Topicality (formulated as ‘logical subjecthood’) is mentioned as a characteristic feature of external possessors by Aissen (1999). I think this suggestion is correct. The saliency of the external possessor should not be associated with sentience or empathy. In the case of constructions with spatial nouns we are dealing with cognitive saliency expressed in terms of the figure-ground configuration. Outside the spatial domain the counterpart of cognitive saliency is discourse saliency, which is reflected in the unmarked selection of main and subordinate topics.

As noted above with reference to example sentence (1), the effect of the external possessor construction can be that of introducing a sub-

only with verbs of motion, whereas *priekšā* is, in this sense, used mainly with *būt* ‘be’ and characterises the relative positions of two competitors at a given moment.

ordinate topic. By introducing one more clausal constituent, external possessors change not the theta structure of the verb, but the degree of articulation of topic-comment structure. Of course, topicalisation of the external possessor cannot be the whole story. As we have seen, the external possessor construction is also used to extract the possessor from its fixed position immediately preceding the possessum; this is shown by (2) and (6). In these cases there is no topicalisation of the possessor; rather, it is the possessum that seems to function as subordinate topic. Perhaps these sentences, in combination with examples like (1), provide us with a clue. The general effect (though not the functional motivation) of the external possessor construction could be to increase the degree of articulation of the topic-comment structure (thematic-rhematic structure) of the clause by introducing a larger number of clausal constituents than the theta structure of the verb is able to licence. The effect of this operation can be that the external possessor is topicalised, but it is also possible that the possessum becomes a subordinate topic set off from a rhematic external possessor following it.

If this is correct, then we obtain an explanation for an apparent contradiction pointed out by Payne and Barshi (1999, 24, fn. 17). Kuno (1973) and other authors claim that, in Japanese, the external possessor construction is used to put the possessor in contrastive focus. Perhaps there is not really a contradiction between the contrasting functions of topicalisation and focusing: if the effect of the construction is to increase the degree of articulation of the clause in terms of topic-comment structure, then this device can be exploited in two different ways. Of course, we should distinguish two layers in this phenomenon. The primary purpose of external possession is to provide a way of topicalising the possessor by creating a clause constituent position for it. Once this operation has been carried out, and the degree of articulation of the clause in terms of topic-comment structure has been increased, the construction also becomes available for opposite effects.

The notion of saliency, viewed in its dual aspect of cognitive saliency and discourse saliency, therefore seems to be the rationale underlying the external possessor construction in both uses discussed in this paper. The notions of figure and ground are originally associated with the organisation of spatial scenes, and their application to the analy-

sis of sentence structure may not appeal to linguists who are not of the cognitive persuasion, but it is useful to point to the long-standing awareness, in the linguistic literature, of the relatedness of possession and location (cf. Lyons 1967, Clark 1978 etc.). The head of any noun phrase with a possessive modifier (in the broadest sense) will act as a figure, imposing the status of ground on its genitival dependent. In a clausal context this internal configuration existing within the noun phrases clashes with the obliqueness hierarchy—a grammatical hierarchy (originally formulated as an ‘accessibility hierarchy’ in Keenan & Comrie 1977) reflecting degrees of inherent discourse saliency, in which animate possessors will naturally occupy high (non-oblique) positions.

When a construction with a relational (spatial) noun and a genitival modifier is used to express spatial relations, the inherently locative character of the possessive relation need not even act in disguise. The relational noun acts as the figure and the genitival modifier (or complement, if one interprets the noun as having effectively become an adposition) as the ground. In this instance, differences in animacy may, but need not be involved, whereas they prototypically are in possession. The external possessor construction is therefore not necessarily associated with animacy or sentiency. The only condition is a change in perspective, the construction being used not for locating an object but for characterising the reference object (ground).

In the historical development of Latvian, the use of the external possessor construction in spatial expressions based on relational nouns is no doubt an innovation. A glance at the situation in Lithuanian suggests that the conditions imposed on the external possessor construction with regard to animacy of the possessor and dynamicity of the predicate were relaxed, which enabled the extension of the construction to spatial expressions based on relational nouns. But the semantic distinctions we observe within these spatial expressions are not an accidental extension of the external possessor construction to a domain where its original rationale was no longer applicable and had therefore to be reanalysed in spatial terms. On the contrary, in view of the inherently locative nature of possessivity this was rather a return to the sources. This leads us to the conclusion that the ‘possessive’ and the ‘spatial’ applications of the external possessor construction

reflect some common principles, in view of which certain effects often associated with the external possessive construction, in particular sentience and affectedness, must appear rather epiphenomenal. The common principle is, as I would like to suggest, saliency. This common principle manifests itself as discourse saliency in the average type of external possessor construction, as a means of assigning to the possessor the status of a (subordinate) topic (more generally, it may be said to increase the degree of articulation of the clause in terms of topic-comment structure, but this is a secondary development with regard to the function of topicalising device). And it manifests itself as cognitive saliency in spatial constructions, as a means of shifting the status of salient entity from the figure (the located object) to the ground (the reference object). Of course, if the reference object is an animate being, it will be inherently more salient.

In view of this, rather than being an accidental extension of the external possession construction, the Latvian constructions with genitive-dative alternation in spatial expressions yield us new insights into the very nature of the external possessor construction. Taking the inherently locational character of possession into account, we should recognise that the term ‘external possession’ is actually too narrow, as it reflects only one of the aspects of a wider phenomenon. The title of this article, ‘Beyond external possession’, is therefore to be understood in two ways: in one sense, the alternation of genitive and dative with relational nouns in Latvian is a further development based on the external possessor construction; in another sense, this extension tells us something about the more general principles underlying the construction.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACC — accusative, ACT — active, COMP — comparative, COND conditional, DAT — dative, DEB — debitive, DEF — definite, DEM — demonstrative, DIM — diminutive, F — feminine, FUT — future, GEN — genitive, INF — infinitive, LOC — locative, M — masculine, NEG — negation, NOM — nominative, PASS — passive, PL — plural, PN — proper name, POSS — possessive pronoun, PRS — present, PRTC — participle, PST — past, PVB — preverb, REFL — reflexive, SG — singular

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