An Empirical Examination of the Russian Dative of Possession

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1. Introduction. An examination of the literature reveals a lack of empirical data-driven studies on the dative of possession in Russian within the syntax-semantics interface and pragmatics. Levine (1984, 1986, 1990), Cienki (1993), Pete (1979), Vácha (1974), Garde (1985), Šarić (2002), Paykin & van Peteghem (2003), and others base their studies on the informal acceptability judgments of a small group of Russian native speakers and excerpts from classical Russian literature. With this method, there is much opportunity for flawed data and analysis (Schütze, 2016). Test sentences can be easily manipulated and cherry-picked by the researcher to yield desired results. A small sample size of native speakers ignores the possibility of interspeaker variation in a language; this is especially pertinent for controversial and unclear cases of grammaticality (Levelt et al., 1977). Additionally, acceptability judgment data are often provided by students, colleagues, or personal acquaintances of the researcher – or even the researcher themself. As for the method of using excerpts from literature as judgment data, there are also flaws. The researcher might specifically select excerpts that support their theory. The literature chosen might not resemble the acceptability judgments of contemporary native speakers. This study fills this gap in the research with a systematic, empirical data-driven study of the Russian dative of possession.

2. Dative possessive constructions. In addition to its typical usages, such as for the indirect object (e.g., He gave *her* the apple), the dative can be employed for various semantic and pragmatic functions. A key element of the dative is the notion of affectedness, or as Jakobson (1936/71) characterizes it, directionality. This is shown in sentences (1–2) from Cienki (1993), in which the dative is used to represent an experiencer in (1) and a prepositional object of direction in (2).

(1) *Mne* *kholodno.*
me-DAT cold
'I'm cold.'

(2) *My* *ezdili* *k* *babushke.*
we-NOM go-PST to grandma-DAT
'We went to grandma's [house].'

The dative can also indicate possession, portraying the possessor to be affected by an action done to the possessum (object of possession). Possessive constructions can be categorized into three types: inalienable possession, alienable possession, and kinship terms (Levine, 1984). While differing in possessum type, they are unified in their use of a dative case-marked personal pronoun to emphasize the notion of emotional affectedness of the possessor.

2.1. CONSTRUCTIONS OF INALIENABLE POSSESSION. Inalienable possession occurs when the possessum is inseparable from the possessor, e.g., a body part. The construction consists of a possessor (dative NP), a transitive verb, a possessum (accusative NP), and a preposition (if appropriate). The verb implies a change of state, often with a negative connotation. The dative

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case signifies that the possessor is affected by the action done to the possessum, as in (3–4) (Levine, 1986).

(3) *Remen* *rezhet* *emu* *plecho.*
strap-NOM cut-PRS him-DAT shoulder-ACC
'The strap is cutting into his shoulder.'

(4) *Dozhd'* *khlestal* *nam* *v* *li͡so.*
rain-NOM beat-PST us-DAT in face-ACC
'The rain was beating in our faces.'

The speaker has a choice between a dative case-marked personal pronoun (e.g., *mne*; "me") (hereafter, dative pronoun) or possessive pronoun (e.g., *moǐ*; "my") for possessor. The latter is the standard choice for typical possessive constructions, while for inalienable possession, a possessive pronoun is generally less acceptable than a dative, as in (5–6) (Levine, 1984).

(5) *V* *drake* *emu* *slomali* *rebro.*
in fight-PREP him-DAT break-PST rib-ACC

(6) ? *V* *drake* *slomali* *ego* *rebro.*
in fight-PREP break-PST his-POSS rib-ACC
'His rib was broken in a fight.'

However, Levine (1984) observes that a possessive pronoun is acceptable or even preferable in certain contexts, for example, when the possessum is affected separately from the possessor, such that the two are not considered a unified entity. A possessive pronoun can also be preferred when the possessum signifies the theme of the sentence in the sentence-initial position. This, too, is dependent on context. Additionally, the presence of an adjective modifying the possessum renders a dative pronoun unacceptable, as the possessor and possessum are no longer a unified whole.

2.2. CONSTRUCTIONS OF ALIENABLE POSSESSION. Alienable possession – or as described by Levine (1984), "minimal pairs" of dative versus genitive, – syntactically resembles inalienable possession. Indeed, Pete (1979) does not distinguish between the two types. Alienable possession differs from inalienable possession in that the possessum is not intrinsically inseparable from the possessor, but may be perceived as metaphorically inalienable in a looser sense (Janda, 1993). Items of alienable possession include: clothes, an apartment, a car, a career, and other items deemed important to the possessor (Paykin & van Peteghem, 2003).

In contrast to most instances of inalienable possession, both dative and possessive pronoun possessors are acceptable, as in (7–8) (Levine, 1984). However, these sentences differ stylistically and semantically. A dative pronoun gives the sentence a colloquial and informal style. The possessor is perceived more sympathetically and to be affected by the action done to the possessum. In contrast, a possessive pronoun renders the sentence an objective and neutral tone (Levine, 1984).

(7) *Ona* *razbila* *emu* *ochki.*
she-NOM break-PST him-DAT glasses-ACC

(8) *Ona* *razbila* *ego* *ochki.*
she-NOM break-PST his-POSS glasses-ACC
'She broke his glasses.'

2.3. CONSTRUCTIONS WITH KINSHIP TERMS. The third instance of the dative of possession occurs when the possessum denotes a kinship term. At its most basic level, the construction consists of a possessor (dative NP) and a kinship term possessum (nominative NP). As with the other dative of possession constructions, this is lexically and semantically determined. Kinship term constructions resemble those of alienable possession in that dative and possessive pronoun possessors are generally equally acceptable. Thus, the speaker has a pragmatic choice between a marked dative pronoun, which emphasizes the possessor's affectedness, or a possessive pronoun, which yields a neutral meaning. More concretely, the dative implies that the kinship term possessum "functions like," but is not the actual kin relation of the possessor, as in sentences (9–10) (Levine, 1990).

(9) *Ona* *byla* *emu* *zhenoǐ.*
she-NOM be-PST him-DAT wife-INS
'She was like a wife to him.'

(10) *Ona* *byla* *ego* *zhenoǐ.*
she-NOM be-PST his-POSS wife-INS
'She was his wife.'

3. Conversational implicature and pragmatic inference. Implicature arises when a gap exists between what the speaker said and what he implied. Following Grice's Maxims of the Cooperative Principle, people necessarily communicate cooperatively to be properly understood in conversation (Grice, 1975). Of the four, the Maxim of Quantity – that people provide as much information as is necessary to communicate properly – is most applicable.

(11) Grice's Maxims
1. Maxim of Quality – be truthful;
2. Maxim of Quantity – provide as much information as required, not more;
3. Maxim of Relation – be relevant;
4. Maxim of Manner – avoid ambiguity, be perspicuous.

When a speaker chooses a marked feature instead of an unmarked one, the listener infers this choice to be deliberate, according to the Maxim of Quantity. The listener deduces that the speaker seeks to emphasize the marked construction (Levinson, 2000; Katzir, 2007). Regarding kinship terms, for example, the dative possessive construction is marked. The use of a dative pronoun as possessor conveys the affectedness of the possessor. Thus, a conversational implicature arises. Importantly, conversational implicatures must follow cancelability and non-detachability.

3.1. KINSHIP TERMS. The dative of possession with kinship terms is a clear example of conversational implicature. The speaker has a choice between a dative or a standard possessive pronoun for possessor. If the speaker selects the marked dative pronoun instead of the neutral,

unmarked possessor pronoun, this tells the listener that the speaker seeks to underscore the affectedness of the possessor, following Grice's Maxim of Quantity. If the speaker wanted to relay objective, neutral information, he would have employed the genitive construction. In sentences (12–14), the dative pronoun in (12) generates the conversational implicature that the man functioned like a father, but was not the actual father (14) (Levine, 1990).

(12)

On	*byl*	*mne*	*ottsom.*
he-NOM	be-PST	me-DAT	father-INS

'He was like a father to me.'

(13)

On	*byl*	*moim*	*ottsom.*
he-NOM	be-PST	my-POSS-INS	father-INS

'He was my father.'

(14)

On	*ne*	*byl*	*moim*	*ottsom.*
he-NOM	NEG	be-PST	my-POSS-INS	father-INS

'He was not my father.'

The conversational implicature can be supported in a context such as (15). Or, the conversational implicature can be cancelled with a context such as in (16). This proves that the pragmatic inference produced by the dative of possession is indeed a conversational implicature (Levine, 1990).

(15)

Posle	*smerti*	*ottsa*	*vtoroĭ*	*muzh*
after	death-GEN	father-GEN	2-ORD.NOM	husband-NOM
	materi	*byl*	*mne*	*ottsom.*
	mother-GEN	be-PST	me-DAT	father-INS

'After my father's death, my mother's second husband was like a father to me.'

(16)

Mama	*umerla*	*ot*	*raka*	*v*	*1970-m*	*godu*	
mom-NOM	die-PST	from	cancer-GEN	in	1970-ORD.PREP	year-PREP	
	v	*tiazhëloe*	*vremia*	*posle*	*eë*	*smerti*	
	in	difficult-ACC	time-ACC	after	her-POSS	death-GEN	
	papa	*byl*	*mne*	*i*	*ottsom*	*i*	*mater'iu.*
	dad-NOM	be-PST	me-DAT	and	father-INS	and	mother-INS

'In 1970, my mom died from cancer. In the difficult time after her death, my dad was both a father and a mother to me.'

Additional proof of the conversational implicature can be found with non-detachability. In (17), it is shown that the conversational implicature of (12) remains when replaced by a synonymous sentence (Levine, 1990).

(17)

On	*vël*	*sebia*	*po*	*otnosheniiu*	*ko*	*mne*	*kak*	*otets.*
he-NOM	conduct-PST	REFL.ACC	by	relation-DAT	towards	me-DAT	like	father-NOM

'He behaved like a father to me.'

3.2. ALIENABLE POSSESSION. Instances of the dative construction with alienable possession can be similarly examined for conversational implicature. Dative and possessive pronouns are equally acceptable as possessors, although they differ stylistically and semantically. The speaker

makes a pragmatic decision by choosing the marked dative pronoun instead of the neutral, more standard possessive pronoun. Specifically, the speaker uses the dative of possession to communicate that the possessor was affected by the action done to the possessum, lending a sympathetic and emotional tone to the sentence. Using (18–20), the listener draws the inference of (20) from the information in (18). If he was not wearing the glasses, he would not be affected by her breaking them. However, it is impossible to infer (20) from (19) (Levine, 1990).

(18) *Ona* *razbila* *emu* *ochki.*
she-NOM break-PST him-DAT glasses-ACC

(19) *Ona* *razbila* *ego* *ochki.*
she-NOM break-PST his-POSS glasses-ACC
'She broke his glasses.'

(20) *On* *byl* *v* *ochkakh.*
he-NOM be-PST in glasses-PREP
'He was wearing glasses.'

The inference generated by the dative of possession is cancelable, as shown in sentences (21–24) (Levine, 1990). Here, the inference—that the women was wearing the blouse—can be either affirmed by (23) or canceled by (24).

(21) *Rebënok* *prolil* *sok* *eĭ* *na* *bluzku.*
child-NOM spill-PST juice-ACC her-DAT on blouse-ACC

(22) *Rebënok* *prolil* *sok* *na* *eë* *bluzku.*
child-NOM spill-PST juice-ACC on her-POSS blouse-ACC
'The child spilled juice on her blouse.'

(23) *Eĭ* *prishlos'* *eë* *sn͡iat'.*
her-DAT come-PST-REFL her-ACC take.off-INF
'She had to take it [the blouse] off.'

(24) *Ona* *ostavila* *eë* *na* *divane* *ne* *povesila* *v* *shkaf.*
she-NOM leave-PST her-ACC on sofa-PREP NEG hang-PST in closet-ACC
'She left it on the sofa, she didn't hang it up in the closet.'

However, Grice's (1975) second requirement for conversational implicature, non-detachability, is unfulfilled. As Levine (1990) asserts, attempts to generate a sentence synonymous to the original (21) are unable to reproduce the pragmatic inference of the dative of possession. Thus, this inference is uniquely reliant on the dative possessive construction. In sentences (25–26), when the dative pronoun is substituted with the possessive pronoun, the truth condition remains the same, but the pragmatic inference – that the napkin was being used to protect the woman's clothes, perhaps on her lap – is lost. The possessive pronoun does not imply the location of the napkin; it could have been anywhere (Levine, 1990).

(25) *Rebënok* *prolil* *sok* *eĭ* *na* *salfetku.*
child-NOM spill-PST juice-ACC her-DAT on napkin-ACC

Rebënok *prolil* *sok* *na* *eë* *salfetku.*

(26) child-NOM spill-PST juice-ACC on her-POSS napkin-ACC
'The child spilled juice on her napkin.'

The pragmatic inference generated by dative possessive constructions with alienable possession is not conversational implicature. However, it might be an instance of conventionalized implicature; the grammaticalization of the implication that the possessor is wearing the possessum if the dative of possession occurs with alienable possession (Levine, 1990). [1]

3.3. INALIENABLE POSSESSION. Inalienable possession differs from alienable possession and kinship terms in that (excluding context-specific exceptions) a dative pronoun is consistently preferred over a possessive pronoun, as in (27–28) from Levine (1984). Accordingly, there is little potential for conversational implicature with inalienable possession (Pete, 1979; Vácha, 1974).

(27) *Esli on opi͡at' opozdaet nachal'nik golovu emu otorvët.*
if he-NOM again be.late-PRS boss-NOM head-ACC him-DAT tear.off-FUT

(28) ?? *Esli on opi͡at' opozdaet nachal'nik otorvët ego golovu.*
if he-NOM again be.late-PRS boss-NOM tear.off-FUT his-POSS head-ACC
'If he's late again, the boss will rip his head off.'

4. Methodology. The scope of this study is narrowed to focus on alienable possession and kinship terms, as they uniquely pertain to conversational implicature and pragmatic inference. Theoretical claims on the dative of possession could be challenged if Russian native speakers' (NS) acceptability judgments differ from those in the literature.

4.1. PARTICIPANTS. NS Russian (n=26) were asked to complete a contextualized forced-choice acceptability judgment task (24 targets, 24 fillers) on the survey data collection platform Qualtrics, which took an average of 15 minutes. Thirteen volunteer participants were recruited through personal connections and social media. The remaining half were recruited via Prolific, an online research platform for participant recruitment, and were compensated at an average rate of 15 USD per hour. Nineteen participants were female and seven were male. Most participants belonged to the 18–30 age range, with only eight participants above the age of 30. All identified Russian as their native language and the survey was conducted exclusively in Russian. Participant demographics are discussed further in Section 6.3.

4.2. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN. After reading a short introduction and consenting to participate in the study, participants were asked to complete a series of demographic questions. They were then familiarized with the survey format with two practice items resembling the test items.

Test items consisted of a short contextual paragraph that determined the condition: for kinship terms, kin or not kin; and for alienable possession, not affected or affected (see Tables 1 and 3). Participants were presented with two sentences that differed only in possessor type

[1] According to Potts (2007, pg. 669) and Vallée (2008, pg. 413), conventional implicature is not cancellable and is detachable. While alienable possession constructions are detachable, they are also cancellable; they qualify as neither conversational, nor conventional implicature. Levine (1990) terms them "partially conventionalized" implicature and observes that such constructions may be undergoing a conventionalization process over time.

(possessive vs. dative pronoun) and asked to choose the most natural of two options as a continuation of the preceding paragraph (see Tables 2 and 4). Participants were specifically instructed to select the option that sounded most *estestvenno* ("natural") in the given context and told that all sentence options were grammatically correct.

	Context paragraph									
Kin condition	*U*	*sestry*	*moeĭ*	*mamy*	*Anny*	*nikogda*	*ne*	*bylo*	*svoikh*	*deteĭ,*
	At	sister-GEN	my-GEN	mom-GEN	Anna-GEN	never	NEG	was	her-GEN	kids-GEN,
	poetomu	*eĭ*	*nravilos'*	*provodit'*	*vremi͡a*	*so*	*mnoĭ.*	*I͡a*	*chasto*	*govori͡u:*
	so	she-DAT	liked-REFL	spend-INF	time-ACC	with	me-INS.	I	often	say-IMP:
	'My mom's sister Anna never had children of her own, so she liked to spend time with me. I often say:'									
Non-kin condition	*U*	*podrugi*	*moeĭ*	*mamy*	*Anny*	*nikogda*	*ne*	*bylo*	*svoikh*	*deteĭ,*
	At	friend-GEN	my-GEN	mom-GEN	Anna-GEN	never	NEG	was	her-GEN	kids-GEN,
	poetomu	*eĭ*	*nravilos'*	*provodit'*	*vremi͡a*	*so*	*mnoĭ.*	*I͡a*	*chasto*	*govori͡u:*
	so	she-DAT	liked-REFL	spend-INF	time-ACC	with	me-INS.	I	often	say-IMP:
	'My mom's friend Anna never had children of her own, so she liked to spend time with me. I often say:'									

Table 1. Kinship terms: Sample contextual paragraphs

	Target sentence			
Possessive possessor	*Anna*	*byla*	*moeĭ*	*tëteĭ.*
	Anna	was	my-INS	aunt-INS.
	'Anna was my aunt.'			
Dative possessor	*Anna*	*byla*	*mne*	*tëteĭ.*
	Anna	was	me-DAT	aunt-INS.
	'Anna was like an aunt to me.'			

Table 2. Kinship terms: Sample target sentences

	Context paragraph							
Non-affected condition	*Masha*	*brosila*	*mi͡ach*	*i*	*sluchaĭno*	*udarila*	*ochki*	*Antona,*
	Masha	threw-PERF	ball-ACC	and	accidentally	hit-PERF	glasses	Anton-GEN
	kotorye	*byli*	*na*	*skameĭke.*	*On*	*skazal*	*Mashe:*	
	which	were	on	bench-PREP.	He	told-PERF	Masha-DAT:	
	'Masha threw the ball and accidentally hit Anton's glasses, which lay on the bench. He told Masha:'							
Affected condition	*Masha*	*brosila*	*mi͡ach*	*i*	*sluchaĭno*	*udarila*	*ochki*	*Antona,*
	Masha	threw-PERF	ball-ACC	and	accidentally	hit-PERF	glasses	Anton-GEN
	Emu	*prishlos'*	*ikh*	*sni͡at'.*	*On*	*skazal*	*Mashe:*	
	He-DAT	came-REFL	them-ACC	take.off-PERF.	He	told-PERF	Masha-DAT:	
	'Masha threw the ball and accidentally hit Anton's glasses. He had to take them off. He told Masha:'							

Table 3. Alienable possession: Sample contextual paragraphs.

	Target sentence			
Possessive possessor	*Ty*	*razbila*	*moi*	*ochki.*
	You	broke-PERF	my	glasses.
	'You broke my glasses.'			
Dative possessor	*Ty*	*razbila*	*mne*	*ochki.*
	You	broke-PERF	me-DAT	glasses.
	'You broke my glasses.'			

Table 4. Alienable possession. Sample target sentences

As this study features two distinct dative possessive constructions, kinship term target items (12) and alienable possession target items (12) acted as mutual distractors. Fillers (24) resembling the format and semantically nuanced topic of the target items were sourced from Cho (2012) and modified slightly to counterbalance for acceptability. The ratio of target items to fillers and distractors is 1:3 for alienable possession and kinship terms, individually. The collective ratio of alienable possession and kinship terms target items to fillers is 1:1. Two presentation lists of 48 test items each were created using a Latin square design.

5. Results. R, an open-source software for statistical computing and graphics, was used for data analysis (R Core Team, 2023). A logistic (binomial) regression was conducted on raw binary scores with possessor type (possessive vs. dative) and context (kinship terms: kinship vs. non-kinship; alienable possession: affectedness vs. non-affectedness) as fixed factors, and with participant and trial as random factors (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). In addition, a pairwise comparison (emmeans) was conducted on raw data with the Bonferroni adjustment to contrast factors (Lenth, 2023).

5.1. KINSHIP TERMS RESULTS. Results for kinship term dative possessive constructions conformed with the claims in the literature. Fixed effects of possessive and dative pronouns in non-kinship contexts were found to be significant. No significant possessor type preference in instances of kinship was found (estimate=-0.308, SE=0.227, z-ratio=-1.357, p=1.0000). A preference for a dative pronoun in instances of non-kinship (estimate=1.744, SE=0.248, z-ratio=7.022, $p<0.0001$) was observed. Figure 1 shows the raw number of possessor type selections for kinship and non-kinship conditions. In Table 5 a comparison of the results with the claims in the literature shows full confirmation of the literature.

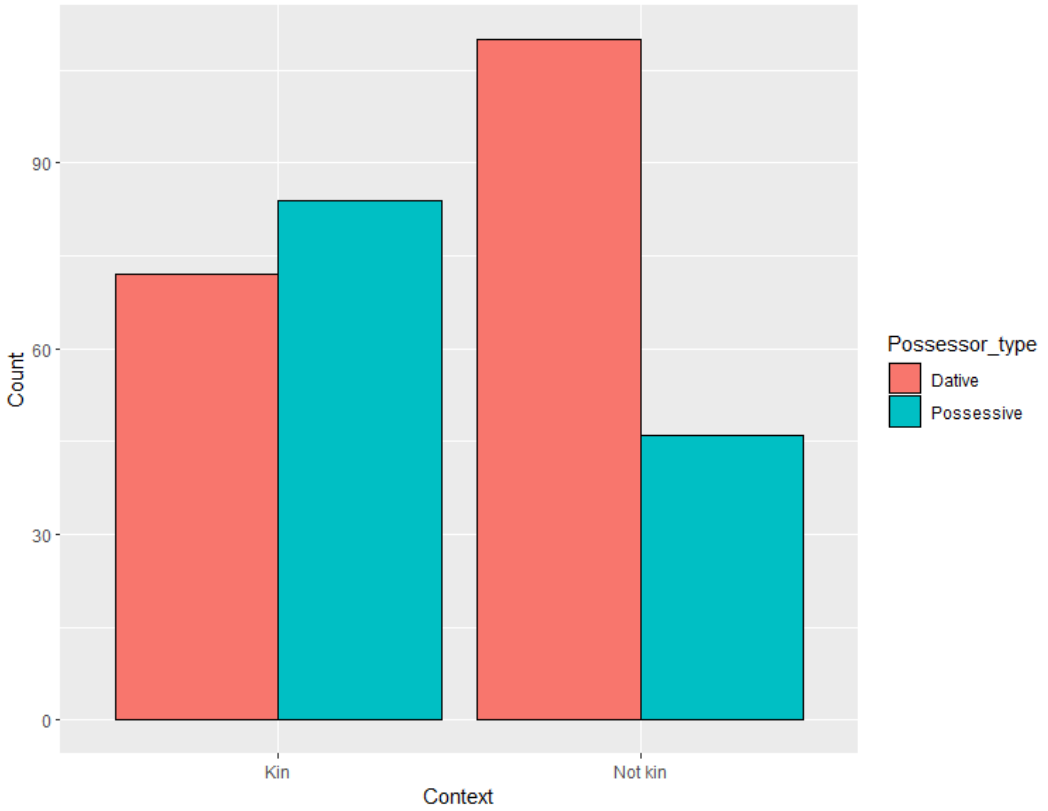

Figure 1. Raw count of possessor pronoun selection as a function of kinship

	Possessive possessor		Dative possessor	
	Literature	Results	Literature	Results
Kin condition	✓	✓	✓	✓
Non-kin condition	X	X	✓	✓

Table 5. Form-meaning mapping of kinship and possessor type in the literature vs. results

5.2. ALIENABLE POSSESSION RESULTS. Results for the dative possessive construction of alienable possession diverged from the literature's claims. There was correlation observed between possessor type and non-affectedness, with fixed effects of possessive and dative pronouns for instances of non-affectedness found to be significant. A pairwise comparison revealed no possessor type preference in instances of affectedness (estimate=0.308, SE=0.227, z-ratio=1,357, p=1.0000) and significant preference for a possessive pronoun in non-affected contexts (estimate=-1.503, SE=0.243, z-ratio=-6.194, p<0.0001). In Figure 2 the raw count of possessor type selections for non-affected and affected contexts illustrate this preference visually. Table 6 demonstrates how the results and the literature diverge. In instances of affectedness, the literature dictates that a possessive pronoun is unnatural, whereas the results assert that there is no possessor pronoun type preference in that context. Additionally, while the literature claims that there is no possessor type preference for instances of non-affectedness, the results show that a possessive possessor is significantly preferred.

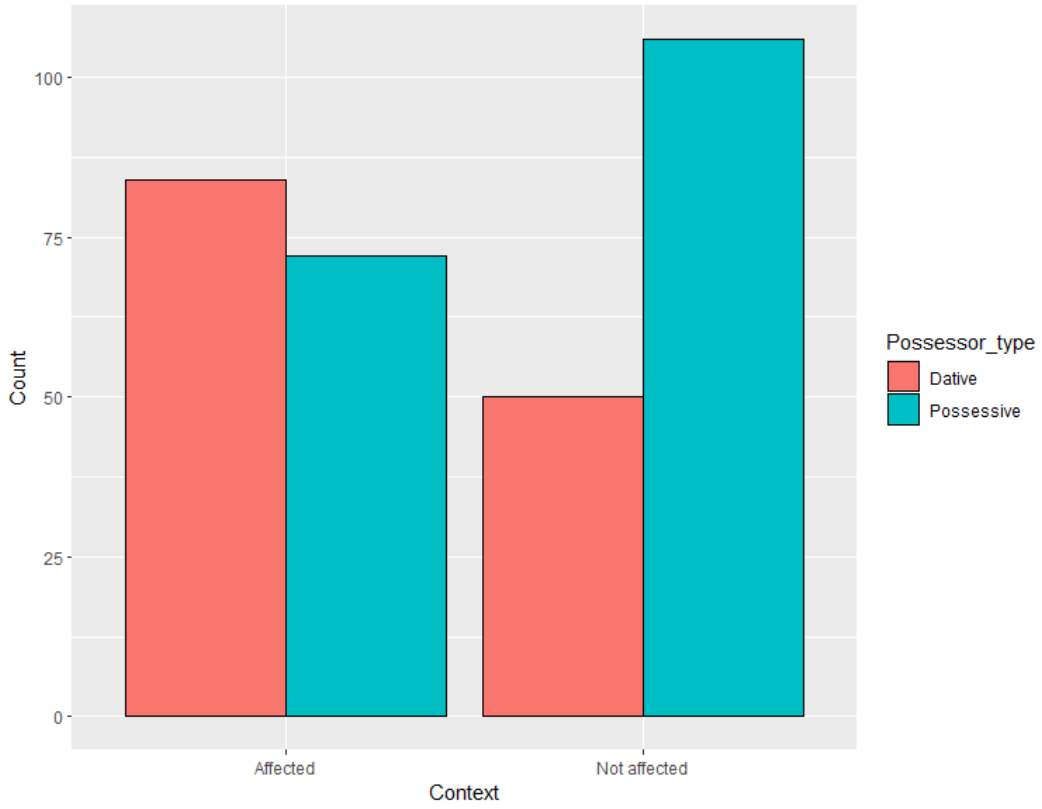

Figure 2. Raw count of possessor pronoun selection as a function of affectedness

	Possessive possessor		Dative possessor	
	Literature	Results	Literature	Results
Non-affected condition	✓	✓	✓	X
Affected condition	X	✓	✓	✓

Table 6. Form-meaning mapping of affectedness and possessor type in the literature vs. results

6. Conclusion and discussion. The results of this study underscore the importance of experimental linguistics research by showing how native speakers' acceptability judgements can support or differ from the literature. NS Russian acceptability judgements for dative possessive constructions involving kinship terms fully aligned with claims in the literature. Participants exhibited a strong preference for a dative pronoun possessor in instances of non-kinship and no possessor pronoun preference in instances of kinship. Thus, the dative pronoun acts as the marked form, while the possessive pronoun acts as the unmarked, standard form. Participants' treatment of dative possessive constructions involving alienable possession opposed claims in the literature. In instances of non-affectedness, participants exhibited a strong preference for a possessive pronoun as possessor, contrary to the literature's assertion of no possessor pronoun preference for that context. Furthermore, while the literature dictates that a dative pronoun is preferred in instances of affectedness, the results revealed no possessor pronoun preference.

6.1. IMPLICATIONS FOR ALIENABLE POSSESSION. Levine (1990) asserts that the non-detachability of alienable possession constructions could be due to a partial conventionalization of the inference. He surmises that through frequent use of the dative possessive construction with

alienable possession, the metaphorical sense of the construction (its inference) is grammaticalized into its literal meaning. Thus, a dative pronoun used in conjunction with an appropriate possessum (e.g., an item stored in the mental lexicon as "an object to cover or clothe the body") has – at least partially – the grammatical meaning of the inference (the possessor was wearing the possessum).

The results of this study do not conform with Levine's (1990) speculations; in instances of affectedness, no possessor pronoun preference was found. Moreover, the results observed a strong preference for a possessive pronoun possessor in instances of non-affectedness, for which Levine (1990) asserts there is no possessor pronoun preference. However, on a fundamental level, claims in the literature are correct; a relationship between possessor pronoun type and non-affectedness with alienable possession is observed.

I propose that the results of this study point to larger similarities between alienable and inalienable possession. For alienable possession, a possessive pronoun is used to emphasize the non-affectedness of the possessor, effectively acting as the marked form, while a dative pronoun acts as the unmarked form. This dichotomy is not dissimilar to that with inalienable possession, for which a dative pronoun possessor is preferred and a possessive pronoun possessor is used sparingly, but when used, treats the possessor and possessum as separate entities (although physically inseparable). Metaphorically, a possessive pronoun separates the possessor and possessum emotionally for alienable possession and physically for inalienable possession. This conforms with Pete's (1979) classification of alienable and inalienable possession as two subcategories of the same dative possessive construction.

6.2. LINGUISTICS RESEARCH. This study has not only shed light on the intricacies of the Russian dative of possession, but also provided a strong argument in favor of quantitative methods in linguistics research. The literature on the Russian dative of possession consists exclusively of qualitative, informal acceptability judgments of small groups of participants. This traditional method of linguistics research is fraught with opportunities for bias, flawed data, and overgeneralization (Gibson & Federenko, 2013). Phillips (2009) argues that there are no examples of an incorrect informal acceptability judgment becoming the basis for a generalization or widely accepted theoretical claim. For dative possessive constructions involving kinship terms, his claim appears to be true. However, alienable possession results of this study refuted theoretical claims in the literature on the Russian dative of possession, thereby disproving Phillips' (2009) claim that traditional methods in linguistics research are dependable. I hope this study has shown that although theoretical claims in the literature can often be true, they cannot be relied on with complete certainty. A linguist's intuitive judgment and qualitative methods have a place in linguistics research, as do empirical data, quantitative methods, formal acceptability judgments, and statistical analysis.

6.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH. Firstly, participant demographics were not equally balanced, although no significant difference in results as a factor of gender, age, or recruitment method was found. The age and country of origin of participants could have potentially affected results, as changes in the Russian language across generations and the Russophone world and its diaspora have occurred. Participants' knowledge of additional languages could have also impacted results. The number of participants (n=26) yielded statistically significant results, although in future studies, a larger number of participants would be ideal.

I implemented a forced-choice judgment task for this study instead of a Likert scale acceptability judgment task, as it was best suited to the binary nature and subtle semantic nuances of the topic. However, Likert scale ratings in conjunction with a forced-choice judgment task would yield more informative data. Additionally, an option for "I don't know" could be a better alternative to a randomly selected sentence when the participant is unsure.

This study called into question claims in the literature surrounding the dative possessive construction of alienable possession, however, language change over time was not accounted for. Sources contributing to the literature on the Russian dative of possession, such as Garde (1985), Gustavsson (1976), Levine (1984, 1986, 1990), Pete (1979), and Vácha (1974/75), are far from recent. Ranging from 33 to 49 years at time of writing, they may have accurately represented the Russian dative of possession as it was used at that time. Moreover, Garde (1985), Pete (1979), and Vácha (1974/75) draw samples of the dative of possession from classical Russian literature, which is of a higher register and older style than contemporary Russian vernacular. It is possible that possessor pronoun preference with dative possessive constructions has evolved in the Russian language over decades. This is a potential explanation for differences between claims in the literature and the results on alienable possession. I leave this for further research.

Further experimentation on alienable possession would bolster the validity of this study's findings as well as provide insights on similarities between alienable and inalienable possession. Additionally, widening the scope of the study to include L2 Russian learners and Russian heritage speakers could be fruitful.

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