

# Case and Affectedness in German Inalienable Possession Constructions\*

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**Abstract:** The possessor in German inalienable possession constructions can be an accusative or dative-marked nominal, as in *Der Junge hat ihn/ihm in die Nase gebissen* 'The boy bit him (ACC/DAT) into the nose' (see also Wegener 1985, Draye 1996, and Lamiroy and Delbecque 1998). Not all participating verbs allow this case optionality. Some require accusative, others seem to require dative when modified by one kind of PP but take accusative when modified by another kind of PP. This paper argues that the option of having a possessor dative, an instance of 'external possession,' depends on the possibility of using the verb intransitively, with a Goal PP indicating the endpoint of a directed motion.

## 0. Introduction: A Data Puzzle

As previously noted by Wegener (1985), Draye (1996), and Lamiroy and Delbecque (1998), the possessor of a PP-embedded body part in German inalienable possession constructions can be an accusative or dative-marked nominal. The data in (1-4) illustrate the seemingly random distribution of accusative and dative case.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Der Junge hat ihn/ihm in die Nase gebissen.  
the boy has him-ACC/DAT in the nose bitten  
'The boy bit him in the nose.'
- (2) Das Kind hat sie/ihr in den Unterleib getreten.  
the child has her-ACC/DAT in the abdomen kicked  
'The child kicked her in the abdomen.'
- (3) Der Mann hat sie/?\*ihr auf den Mund geküsst.  
the man has her-ACC/?\*DAT on the mouth kissed  
'The man kissed her on the mouth.'

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<sup>1</sup> The judgments given here hold for speakers of standard German. People who speak or are used to hearing non-standard dialects of German may accept both accusative and dative in all of these examples.

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- (4) a. Die Mutter hat ihn/\*ihm am Kopf gestreichelt.  
the mother has him-ACC/\*DAT on-the head stroked  
'The mother caressed him on the head.'
- b. Die Mutter hat \*ihn/ihm über den Kopf gestreichelt.  
the mother has him-\*ACC/DAT over the head stroked  
'The mother stroked him over the head.'

It appears that some verbs, like *beißen* and *treten* in (1-2), allow both accusative and dative; certain verbs, like *küssen* in (3), allow only accusative; and again others, like *streicheln* in (4a-b), allow one or the other, depending on what kind of PP embeds the body part. The question is: Can we detect a pattern here? What, if anything, governs the distribution of accusative and dative case in these examples?

Section 1 begins to tackle the problem by discussing the constituent and argument structure of the verbs in (1-4), paying particular attention to how possessor datives fit into the picture. Section 2 reviews and scrutinizes a previous analysis of the data. Section 3 presents the new account proposed here. Finally, section 4 establishes a typology of inalienable possession verbs in German and concludes with a brief comparison of the German data to inalienable possession constructions in other languages.

### 1. Verbal Constituent and Argument Structure

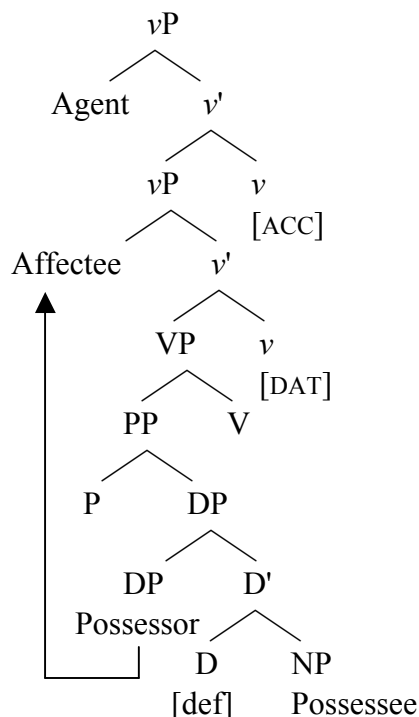
When the possessor in our examples (1-4) is expressed as an accusative-marked pronoun (*ihn* or *sie*), it is simply functioning as the direct object of a transitive verb. That is, the verb takes as its internal argument a DP, in this case a pronoun. When the possessor is expressed as a dative-marked pronoun (*ihm* or *ihr*), however, it cannot straightforwardly be analyzed as an argument of the verb. In order to better understand the function of the dative in these examples, it will be useful to review the syntax of 'external possession.'

#### 1.1. External Possession and Possessor Raising

Unlike canonical genitive-marked possessors, the pronouns in (1-4), which we interpret as the possessors of the respective PP-embedded body parts, are dative-marked and do not show up in the specifier position of the body part DPs. According to the concept of 'external possession' (Payne and Barshi 1999, Vergnaud and Zubizarreta 1992), our dative-marked pronouns function just like genitive-marked possessors inside the possessed nominal (the body part DP), but are realized 'externally' in the verbal argument domain.

One way to capture external possession is to take a possessor raising approach (Landau 1999, Lee-Schoenfeld 2006). As illustrated in Figure 1, possessor raising is A-movement from Spec DP of the possessee to the specifier of a dative-case-licensing affectee *v* projection.

(5) Figure 1: Possessor raising



In our case, this means that, just like a canonical genitive possessor, the pronoun (*ihm* or *ihr*) gets a possessor theta-role from the possessed noun. The pronoun cannot stay in Spec DP of the possessee, however, because this DP has a defective D that cannot case-license the possessor. In other words, there is no genitive case to be valued. The pronoun thus moves to the next higher available case-assigning head, and this is an affectee  $v$  which assigns inherent dative case to the argument in its specifier (see also McIntire 2006). This explains why possessor datives are always interpreted not only as possessor but also as affectee, i.e. as positively or negatively affected by the situation the verb expresses.

Since possessor raising is case-driven movement, it must indeed be an instance of A-movement (not some kind of scrambling), and due to the nature of A-movement, the PP that embeds the body part must be an argument of the verb. Movement out of an adjunct PP would go against the locality restrictions on A-movement.

### 1.2. Directed Motion Verbs

This leads us to conclude that the verbs allowing a possessor dative, like *beißen*, *treten*, and *streicheln* in (1), (2), and (4b), take the body-part-embedding PP as their internal argument. More specifically, they are directed motion verbs with a PP as Goal argument, indicating the endpoint of the directed motion. On a slightly different view (Jan-Wouter Zwart, p.c.), these verbs trigger a resultative construction, where the DP-PP complement of the verb is motivated aspectually rather than on the basis of argument structure.

I will be calling the directed motion/resultative use of the verbs in (1-4), the one that comes with the possibility of a possessor dative, 'intransitive.' And unsurprisingly, I will be referring to the other use, the one that comes with the possibility of an accusative-marked possessor, as 'transitive.' The two different uses of these verbs will be discussed further in section 3, and I will argue for directed motion as the key to the analysis of the accusative/dative case alternation in inalienable possession constructions like (1-4). Before I do this, however, I will present in section 2 an alternative approach to the data puzzle, based crucially on the notion of affectedness.

## 2. A Previous Account

When it comes to the external possessor in body part constructions, it is commonly agreed upon that accusative case marking indicates reference to the whole person, with the body part added as an aside, whereas dative case marking indicates specific reference to the affected part of the person (see e.g. Hole 2004). Based on this assumption, Draye (1996) and Lamiroy and Delbecque (1998; henceforth L&D) argue that accusative case marking means that the possessor is more affected, while dative case marking means that the possessor is less affected. Accordingly, Draye's and L&D's account of the inalienable possession examples in (6a-b) and (7a-b) (their examples 17a-18a and 117b-118b, respectively), which are very similar to our starting point data in (1-4), is that the accusative/dative case alternation depends on how much affectedness the sentence expresses for the possessor of the body part.

- (6) a. Der Mann hat mich/mir ins Gesicht geschlagen. (L&D 1998:38, ex. 17a)  
the man has me-ACC/DAT in-the face hit  
*'The man hit me in the face.'*
- b. Der Regen hat \*mich/mir ins Gesicht geschlagen. (L&D 1998:38, ex. 18a)  
the rain has me-\*ACC/DAT in-the face hit  
*'The rain hit me in the face.'*
- (7) a. Er streichelte <sup>?</sup>sie/ihr zärtlich übers Haar.<sup>2</sup> (Draye 1996:199, ex. 117b)  
he caressed her-<sup>?</sup>ACC/DAT tenderly over-the hair  
*'He gently caressed her hair.'*
- b. Er küsste sie/<sup>?</sup>ihr voll auf den Mund. (Draye 1996:199, ex. 118b)  
he kissed her-ACC/<sup>?</sup>DAT fully on the mouth  
*'He kissed her right on the mouth.'*

L&D's explanation of the accusative/dative alternation in (6a-b) is as follows:

*Der Regen* ('the rain') in (18a) is less agentive than *der Mann* ('the man') in (17), and therefore, the patient is less directly concerned by the process: hence, accusative and dative no longer alternate in (18a) as they do in (17). (L&D 1998:38)

<sup>2</sup> The judgments here are Draye's. For me, *sie* in (7a) gets a star, not a question mark.

In other words, the claim is that accusative is ungrammatical in (6b) because this sentence does not express enough affectedness for the possessor of the face – being hit by rain is not as bad as being hit by a man. The fact that (6a) allows not only accusative but also dative remains unexplained. If dative is only grammatical when the possessor of the body part is not significantly affected, and if a man's punch is something that strongly affects the possessor, then, in L&D's system, only accusative, and not dative, should be possible.

Commenting on the accusative/dative alternation in (7a-b), Draye writes:

Here dative marking correlates with an experiencer who is less affected by the verbal process than is an experiencer in the accusative. The case marking of the experiencer NP depends on both the intentionality and the intensity of the process. This explains, e.g., the markedness of the accusative in (117b) and of the dative in (118b). (Draye 1996:199)

Put slightly differently, the argument is that being fully kissed on the mouth is intense (and intentional) and therefore licenses an accusative-marked possessor, while being merely gently caressed is not as intense (or intentional) and therefore only licenses a dative-marked possessor. Of course, it is far from clear that kissing right on the mouth is necessarily more intense/intentional than tender caressing – it would be difficult to come up with an objective way of measuring this. Furthermore, the case-marking of the possessor does not change with the use of a different adverb (e.g. *leidenschaftlich* 'passionately' instead of *zärtlich* 'tenderly' in 7a). Thus, the case alternation in all of the examples examined thus far should not be based on the degree of affectedness involved. It is true that affectedness comes into play when both accusative and dative are grammatical options in that the speaker may choose one or the other case depending on the affectedness of the possessor – this will be discussed in more detail in the following section – but degree of affectedness cannot be the decisive factor when one case is grammatical and the other degraded/ungrammatical.

### 3. The New Account

As alluded to already in section 1.2, the main claim this paper makes is that the accusative versus dative case marking of the possessor in constructions like (1-4) depends on the possibility of using the verb as expressing directed motion (i.e. as a resultative), with a Goal PP indicating the endpoint of the directed motion. The verbs allowing the construction have two uses: (i) the transitive use, with the PP as an adjunct and (ii) the intransitive/directed motion/resultative use, with the P as a Goal argument. Given these two uses, we can distinguish between four different types of verbs that participate in the construction.

#### 3.1 Verb Type A

Type A includes verbs that can be used transitively, i.e. have use (i), and also necessarily express directed motion, i.e. have use (ii). Examples are *beißen* 'bite' and *treten* 'kick.' In this category, the two uses thus overlap. The possessor can be accusative or dative-marked, and the PP ex-

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presses the endpoint of the directed motion optionally (as an adjunct) or obligatorily (as a Goal argument). The verb's meaning in use (i) is the same as its meaning in use (ii). This is illustrated in examples (8-9), where the two verb uses are shown independently of the inalienable possession construction.

- (8) a. Der Junge hat ihn gebissen. (i)  
the boy has him-ACC bitten  
'The boy bit him.'
- b. Der Junge hat ins Kissen gebissen. (ii)  
the boy has in-the-ACC pillow bitten  
'The boy bit into the pillow.'
- (9) a. Das Kind hat sie getreten. (i)  
the child has her-ACC kicked  
'The child kicked her.'
- b. Das Kind hat gegen den Schrank getreten. (ii)  
the child has against the-ACC cabinet kicked  
'The child kicked (with his foot) against the cabinet.'

The directed motion expressed by verbs of type A, like *beißen* and *treten*, starts where the moving body part (e.g. the mouth or the foot) is located before the action, and it ends where the target is (e.g. another person, a pillow or a cabinet). This holds for both uses, i.e. whether there is a direct object (use i) or a Goal PP (use ii). Notice that, when the PP is a Goal argument, the P always takes an accusative-marked DP. The P *in* is a so-called two-way preposition, which takes accusative case to indicate direction or dative case to indicate location. In (8), it takes an accusative-marked DP to indicate the direction of the biting. When the PP is an adjunct, the P can take either case and therefore indicate direction or location. In (10), for example, we see use (i) with a locative PP adjunct, where the P *an*, another two-way preposition, takes a dative-marked DP.

- (10) Der Hund hat ihn mehrere Male am Bein gebissen. (i)  
the dog has him-ACC several times at-the-DAT leg bitten  
'The dog bit him several times on the leg.'

Here, the PP adjunct *am Bein* specifies which area of the victim's body was affected by the dog's repeated bites. Despite the iterative aspect, however, the verb still expresses the same directed motion as in (8), a telic event (or Accomplishment).

### 3.2 Verb Type B

Type B includes verbs that can only be used transitively, i.e. only have use (i). These verbs, like *küssen* 'kiss,' require a direct object and are therefore ungrammatical if a Goal PP replaces the di-

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rect object as internal argument. This is shown in examples (11a-b), which again focus on the use of the verb independently of inalienable possession.

- (11) a. Der Mann hat sie geküsst. (i)  
the man has her-ACC kissed  
'The man kissed her.'
- b.\* Der Mann hat auf den Pokal geküsst. \*(ii)  
the man has on the-ACC trophy kissed  
'The man kissed onto the trophy.'

Interestingly, *küssen* could pass as a type A verb in that it is most often used to express a directed motion. The kissing action starts at the mouth of the kisser and ends at the target (e.g. another person). Unlike a type A verb, however, *küssen* may not take the target or endpoint of the directed motion as its internal argument. The characteristic restriction on type B verbs is that they must take a direct object. As we will see in subsection 3.4, *küssen* also has something in common with type D verbs. When it is used with a locative adjunct as in (12), rather than a directional one as in (11b), *küssen* takes on a different meaning. It no longer expresses a telic directed motion (an Accomplishment) but rather a prolonged contact between someone's mouth and a spot on someone else's body (e.g. his or her neck) (an Activity).

- (12) Er hat sie am Hals geküsst. (i)  
the has her-ACC at-the-DAT neck kissed  
'He kissed her on the neck.'

Here, again, the two-way preposition *an* takes a dative-marked DP and therefore indicates a location, rather than a direction or target.

### 3.3 Verb Type C

To provide a complete typology, before moving on to verbs like *streicheln* 'caress/stroke,' which can be used transitively or intransitively, we need to add the counterpart of type B, namely verbs that only have the intransitive use (ii). An accusative-marked possessor is impossible with verbs of type C simply because they are strictly intransitive, unable to take a direct object. They can be used with a Goal PP or without a complement. An example is *spucken* 'spit.' (13) illustrates the use of this verb without possessor and (14) shows it used in the type of inalienable possession construction that is at issue here.

- (13) Der Jogger hat (auf den Boden) gespuckt. (ii)  
the jogger has (on the-ACC ground) spit  
'The jogger spit (on the ground).'

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- (14) a. Der Typ hat \*sie/ihr auf den Kopf gespuckt. \*(i)/(ii)  
the guy has her-\*ACC/DAT on the-ACC head spit  
'The guy spit her on the head.'

#### 3.4. Verb Type D

Type D includes verbs that can be used transitively or intransitively, i.e. they have both use (i) and use (ii), but unlike verbs of type A, they do not mean the same thing in the two different uses. This is because they do not inherently express a directed motion. As we saw in (4) of the starting point data, *streicheln* 'caress/stroke' allows an accusative marked possessor with a non-goal PP, a locative adjunct, and it allows a dative-marked possessor with a PP as Goal argument. (15) illustrates the meaning difference between the two uses.

- (15) a. Die Mutter hat ihn gestreichelt. (i)  
the mother has him-ACC stroked  
'The mother caressed him (without directed motion).'
- b. Sie streichelte verstohlen über ihre neue Ledertasche. (ii)  
she stroked furtively over her-GEN new leather-bag  
'She furtively stroked (literally: over/across) her new bag.'

Use (i) of *streicheln* expresses a caressing event that is not directed along a path and has no inherent endpoint. This is clearly an Activity (*Die Mutter hat ihn {eine Stunde lang/#innerhalb von einer Stunde} gestreichelt* 'The mother caressed him for an hour/#within an hour'). The same holds for the example including inalienable possession in the starting point data set, repeated here as (16a), where the body part is embedded in a locative PP adjunct. Use (ii) of *streicheln* expresses a directed stroking event, starting at point A (e.g. one end of a leather bag) and ending at point B (e.g. the other end of the leather bag). This is an Accomplishment (*Sie streichelte {#eine Sekunde lang/innerhalb von einer Sekunde} über ihre neue Ledertasche* 'She stroked across her new leather bag #for a second/within a second'). And, again, the same holds for the example including inalienable possession in the starting point data set, repeated here as (16b), where the body part is embedded in a Goal PP, and the possessor is dative-marked. Here, we can picture the directed motion as going from the mother's child's forehead toward the back of the head.

- (16) a. Die Mutter hat ihn/\*ihm am Kopf gestreichelt. (i)  
the mother has him-ACC/\*DAT on-the-DAT head stroked  
'The mother caressed him on the head.'
- b. Die Mutter hat \*ihn/ihm über den Kopf gestreichelt. (ii)  
the mother has him-ACC/DAT over the-ACC head stroked  
'The mother stroked him over the head.'



Notice that, again, the Activity expressed by use (i) goes with a locative PP, where the P takes a dative-marked DP, while the Accomplishment expressed by use (ii) goes with a directional PP, where the P takes an accusative-marked DP.

### 3.5 Degree of Affectedness

Getting back to Draye's (1996) and Lamiroy and Delbecque's (1998) account of the data, recall the assumption that accusative case marking indicates reference to the whole person, and dative case marking indicates specific reference to the affected part of the person. I will claim here that, while the new analysis just proposed is compatible with this assumption, speaker intuitions go against the conclusion that both Draye and Lamiroy and Delbecque reach based on the assumption. As laid out in section 2, their conclusion is that accusative case indicates a more affected possessor, and dative case indicates a less affected possessor. Given the results of an informal survey I conducted (see appendix),<sup>3</sup> the opposite holds. An accusative-marked possessor is preferred when the intent is to de-emphasize the undergoer and draw attention to the agent, while a dative-marked possessor is preferred when the intent is not only to focus on the affected body part but also to draw attention to the undergoer. Thus, it is dative case, more so than accusative case, that is associated with affectedness. This result is consistent with interpreting accusative-marked arguments as Theme (the canonical direct object role) and so-called free datives as Affectee, as claimed by many possessor dative analyses (see e.g. Hole 2004, McIntire 2006, and Lee-Schoenfeld 2006). As one informant said, when the possessor is accusative-marked, as in *Der Junge hat ihn in die Nase gebissen* 'The boy bit him (ACC) in the nose,' the sentence is a neutral statement about an event and who was involved in the event. But when the possessor is dative-marked, as in *Der Junge hat ihm in die Nase gebissen* 'The boy bit him (DAT) in the nose,' the sentence makes you empathize with the undergoer of the action.

Thus, attempted accounts of our data puzzle that are based crucially on the degree of affectedness expressed by the verb in the context of the sentence are not tenable, at least not for German. If, as claimed by Draye (1996), the case marking of the possessor depends on the intentionality and intensity of the process, we might expect negative versus positive affectedness to make a difference, perhaps because negative affectedness is more intense. This is counter to fact. Dative-case-licensing affectee *v*P projections are compatible with both negatively and positively affected participants. This is shown in (17a-b), where (a) expresses negative affectedness, and (b) positive affectedness.

- (17) a. Tim hat der Nachbarin einfach den Garten ruiniert.  
Tim has the-DAT neighbor-FEM simply the garden ruined  
'Tim simply ruined the neighbor's garden.'

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<sup>3</sup> I thank Viki and Pen Schoenfeld and the native German speakers in the graduate program of the Department of Germanic & Slavic Studies at UGA, especially Antje Lohse and Christine Voigt, for sharing their intuitions with me.

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- b. Dann hat Tim der Nachbarin tatsächlich den Garten wieder schön gemacht.  
then has Tim the-DAT neighbor-FEM actually the garden again nice made  
'Then Tim actually made the neighbor's garden look nice again.'

Furthermore, both *küssen* and *streicheln* are compatible with a dative-marked possessor, regardless of whether one is more intense or intentional than the other. This is illustrated in (18), which shows the transitive use of the verbs, where the body part is not inside a PP but is the direct object.

- (18) a. Er hat ihr die Hand geküsst.  
He has her-DAT the hand kissed  
'He kissed her hand.'  
b. Sie hat ihm den Rücken gestreichelt.  
she has him-DAT the back caressed  
'She caressed his back.'

Given the account proposed here, the accusative/dative case distribution in Lamiroy and Delbecq's (1998) *rain*-example, repeated as (19), falls out as follows.

- (19) Der Regen hat \*mich/mir ins Gesicht geschlagen. (L&D 1998:38, ex. 18a)  
the rain has me-\*ACC/DAT in-the face hit  
'The rain hit me in the face.'

It has to be *mir*, rather than *mich*, i.e. the accusative is ungrammatical, not because the possessor of the face is less affected by rain than by a man's punch, but because *schlagen*, when used with a non-agentive subject like rain, is semantically unacceptable with a direct object. This is shown in (20a). It can only be used as a directed motion verb with a PP as Goal argument, as in (20b).

- (20) a.<sup>#</sup> Der Regen hat mich geschlagen. #(i)  
the rain has me ACC hit  
'The rain hit me.'  
b. Der Regen schlug gegen das Haus. (ii)  
the rain hit against the-ACC house  
'The rain hit against the house.'

Hence, the only way to fit an affected person into the construction is via use (ii) of the verb and thus a dative-marked possessor.

#### 4. Predictions and Extensions

To provide an overview of the three verb types introduced in the previous section and to further flesh out the typology, subsection 4.1 offers a summary in the form of a table and provides additional examples. Subsection 4.2 then takes a cross-linguistic look at inalienable possession constructions in order to see if the analysis can be extended to other languages.

##### 4.1 A Typology of Verbs

The proposed analysis predicts that we should find a number of verbs that fit into each of the established categories. The following table and the examples in (22-25) show that this prediction is borne out.

(21) Table 1: Typology of German inalienable possession verbs with external possessor

	Verb Type A	Verb Type B	Verb Type C	Verb Type D
<b>Use (i):</b> transitive, adjunct PP, ACC possessor	✓	✓	*	✓
<b>Use (ii):</b> intransitive, Goal PP, DAT possessor	✓	*	✓	✓
<b>Meaning</b>	Constant (Accomplishment)	N/A	N/A	Different (Activity- Accomplishment)
<b>Verbs</b>	<i>beißen</i> 'bite' <i>treten</i> 'kick' <i>schlagen</i> 'hit' <i>hauen</i> 'hit' <i>boxen</i> 'box' <i>kneifen</i> 'pinch' ...	<i>küssen</i> 'kiss' <i>kitzeln</i> 'tickle' <i>berühren</i> 'touch' ...	<i>spucken</i> 'spit' <i>bluten</i> 'bleed' <i>schreien</i> 'scream' ...	<i>streicheln</i> 'caress/stroke' <i>bürsten</i> 'brush' <i>sich reiben</i> 'rub (refl.)' ...

- (22) Der Junge hat ihn/ihm in den Bauch geboxt. A: (i), (ii)  
 the boy has him-ACC/DAT in the-ACC belly boxed  
*'The boy punched him in the belly.'*

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- (23) Die Maus hat sie/\*ihr am Fuß gekitzelt. B: (i), \*(ii)  
the mouse has her-ACC/\*DAT on-the-DAT foot tickled  
'The mouse tickled her on the foot.'
- (24) Das Kind hat \*ihn/ihm ins Ohr geschrien. C: \*(i), (ii)  
the child has him-\*ACC/DAT into-the-ACC ear screamed  
'The child screamed in his ear.'
- (25) a. Das Mädchen hat ihn/\*ihm am Bauch gebürstet. D: (i)  
the girl has him-ACC/\*DAT on-the-DAT belly brushed  
'The girl brushed him on the belly.'
- b. Das Mädchen hat \*ihn/ihm über das Fell gebürstet. D: (ii)  
the girl has him-\*ACC/DAT over the-ACC fur brushed  
'The girl brushed over his fur.'

Notice that *küssen* 'kiss' is the only member of verb type B that can be used to express directed motion and therefore be modified by an adjunct PP that indicates an endpoint, with the P taking an accusative-marked DP. The other members, e.g. *kitzeln* 'tickle' in (22), are limited to being modified by a locative adjunct, with the P taking a dative-marked DP.

As for verb type D, *bürsten* 'brush' in (24a-b) works just like *streicheln* 'caress/stroke.' The transitive use (i) expresses a non-directed, atelic brushing event, whereas the intransitive/resultative use (ii) expresses a directed, telic event of brushing from one spot to another (e.g. from a dog's neck to his back).

#### 4.2 Inalienable Possession Cross-linguistically

Let us take a look at a few other languages with inalienable possession constructions similar to the ones we have seen in German, namely Romanian, French, Spanish, and Greek.

Starting with the two Romance languages, drawing on data from Lamiroy and Delbecque (1998), the accusative/dative case alternation exists, i.e. the possessor can be either accusative or dative-marked, but the alternation goes hand in hand with an alternation of how the possessee is expressed. The possessee is expressed as PP-embedded when the possessor is accusative-marked, and as direct object when the possessor is dative-marked. While the possessee in the Romanian examples in (25) is a shirt, not actually a body part, it can still be understood as inalienably possessed.

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- (26) a. Mă închei la cămașă. [Romanian] (D&L 1998:39, ex. 20a)  
 1sg-clitic-ACC button-1sg at shirt  
*'I button my shirt.'*
- b. Îmi închei cămașă. (D&L 1998:39, ex. 20b)  
 1sg-clitic-DAT button-1sg shirt-the  
*'I button my shirt.'*
- (27) a. Paul a mordu Marie au bras. [French] (D&L 1998:39, ex. 21a)  
 Paul has bitten Marie-ACC on-the arm  
*'Paul has bitten Marie on the arm.'*
- b. Paul a mordu le bras à Marie. (D&L 1998:39, ex. 21b)  
 Paul has bitten the arm to-DAT Marie  
*'Paul has bitten Marie's arm.'*

The equivalent in Spanish confirms the case alternation; *a* in (28a) marks an animate accusative element, while *a* in (28b) is understood as a preposition and *le/María* as dative-marked (Chad Howe, p.c.).

- (28) a. Pablo ha mordido a María en el brazo. [Spanish]  
 Paul has bitten ACC Maria on the arm  
*'Paul has bitten Maria on the arm.'*
- b. Pablo le ha mordido el brazo a María  
 Paul 3sg-clitic-DAT has bitten the arm to Maria- DAT  
*'Paul has bitten Marie's arm.'*

Interestingly, we find the exact same pattern in Greek.<sup>4</sup>

- (29) a. Tin filise sto stoma. [Greek]  
 her-ACC kissed-3sg on-the mouth  
*'He kissed her on the mouth.'*
- b. Tis filise to stoma.  
 her-DAT kissed-3sg the mouth  
*'He kissed her mouth.'*

<sup>4</sup> My thanks to Anastasia Giannakidou and Jason Merchant for providing these facts from Greek.

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- (29) a. Tin xaidheve sto kefali. [Greek]  
her-ACC stroked-3sg on-the head  
'He caressed her on the head.'
- b. Tis xaidheve to kefali.  
her-DAT stroked-3sg the head  
'He caressed her head.'

In all of these examples, an accusative-marked possessor goes with a PP-embedded body part, and we only find a dative-marked possessor when the body part is expressed as the direct object. This leads us to the tentative conclusion that the German accusative versus dative case marking of the possessor in inalienable possession constructions is a unique phenomenon. It seems that, only in German can a possessor dative productively co-occur with a PP-embedded body part.

One piece of the inalienable possession case alternation puzzle presented in this paper is the occurrence of two-way prepositions, i.e. Ps that can take either an accusative or a dative-marked DP, depending on whether they indicate direction or location. And two-way prepositions pose a high degree of difficulty for both children acquiring German and second language learners, probably because their occurrence is a marked phenomenon cross-linguistically. It is unsurprising, then, that the inalienable possession case alternation puzzle as a whole is not readily found in other languages either.

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### **Appendix: Questionnaire with Sample Answers<sup>5</sup>**

#### **Sprachwissenschaftliche Umfrage (Linguistic Questionnaire)**

Beantworten Sie bitte für jedes der unten aufgelisteten Satzpaare die folgenden Fragen. Wenn Sie die erste Frage mit „ja“ beantworten, machen Sie bitte mit der zweiten Frage weiter. Und wenn Sie die zweite Frage auch mit „ja“ beantworten, dann schreiben Sie bitte noch etwas zur dritten Frage. Vielen Dank fürs Mitmachen!

(Please answer the following questions for each of the sentence pairs below. If your answer to the first question is "yes", please continue with the second question. If your answer to the second question is "yes" as well, please also respond to the third question. Many thanks for your participation!)

- I. Sind sowohl (a) als auch (b) der folgenden Satzpaare für Sie akzeptabel, d.h. könnte man sowohl (a) als auch (b) sagen?  
(Are both (a) and (b) of the following sentence pairs acceptable, i.e. could you say both (a) and (b)?)
  
  - II. Haben die beiden Sätze unterschiedliche Bedeutungen, auch wenn es nur ein ganz feiner Unterschied ist?  
(Do the two sentences have different meanings, even if the difference is very subtle?)
  
  - III. Versuchen Sie den Unterschied zu erklären. Wann würden Sie (a) und wann würden Sie (b) benutzen? Ist derjenige, der hier gebissen, geküsst, getreten und geschlagen wird, anders betroffen von dem Ereignis?  
(Try to explain the difference. When would you use (a) and when (b)? Ist he person that is being bitten, kissed, kicked, or hit affected by the event in a different way?)
- (1) a. Der Junge hat ihn in die Nase gebissen.  
(The boy bit him-ACC in the nose.)
- b. Der Junge hat ihm in die Nase gebissen.  
(The boy bit him-DAT in the nose.)

*Der Unterschied beider Sätze und damit die Verwendung von Akkusativ bzw. Dativ liegen für mich in der unterschiedlichen Perspektive, die mit beiden Sätzen ausgedrückt wird.*

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<sup>5</sup> This appendix shows my questionnaire and answers (in italics) given by one of six participants.

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*(The difference between these two sentences and thus the use of accusative vs. dative, for me, lies in the different perspectives that are expressed by the sentences.)*

*Ich würde **a** benutzen um auszudrücken, dass das Subjekt als ‚absolutes Agens‘ (sorry – ich weiß natürlich, dass bei beiden Sätzen das Subjekt das Agens ist) auftritt und seine Handlung an einer anderen Person „ausgeführt“ hat. Die Handlungsrichtung geht also vom Subjekt in Richtung Akkusativobjekt. Hier steht eher das Subjekt im Zentrum bzw. wird betont.*

*(I would use **a** in order to express that the subject acts as "absolute agent" (sorry – I know, of course, that the subject is the agent in both sentences) and that he "performed" his action on another person. The direction of the action thus goes from the subject to the accusative object. Here it is the subject that is more central, i.e. emphasized.)*

*Ich würde **b** benutzen, um auszudrücken, dass eine außenstehende Person eine Handlung an der zweiten Person, die hier als Dativobjekt erscheint, „ausgeführt“ hat. Das Dativobjekt ist gewissermaßen der Empfänger einer Handlung, die von außen kommt. Es steht näher im Zentrum.*

*(I would use **b** in order to express that an outside person "performed" an action on a second person, the one which appears as dative object here. The dative object is in a way the receiver of an action that comes from the outside. It [the dative object] is more central.)*

- (2) a. Der Mann hat sie auf den Mund geküsst.  
(The man kissed her-ACC on the mouth.)  
b. Der Mann hat ihr auf den Mund geküsst.  
(The man kissed her-DAT on the mouth.)

*Hier ist für mich nur **a** akzeptabel. Für mich ist nur zweideutig, ob das Personalpronomen „sie“ im Akkusativ Singular oder Plural steht.*

*(Here I find only **a** acceptable. For me it is only ambiguous whether the personal pronoun "sie" is accusative singular or plural.)*

- (3) a. Das Kind hat sie in den Magen getreten.  
(The child kicked her-ACC in the stomach.)  
b. Das Kind hat ihr in den Magen getreten.  
(The child kicked her-DAT in the stomach.)

*Satz **a** ist für mich gerade noch akzeptabel, obwohl ich eher zu **b** tendieren würde. Um die Zweideutigkeit des Personalpronomens „sie“ zu vermeiden, würde ich bei einem Objekt im Singular definitiv **b** wählen. Ansonsten gibt es für mich zwischen beiden Sätzen keinen Bedeutungsunterschied.*

*(Sentence **a** is marginally acceptable for me; I tend more toward liking **b**.) In order to avoid the ambiguity of the personal pronoun "sie", I would definitely choose **b** for a singular object. Otherwise, there is no meaning difference between the two sentences for me.*

- (4) a. Der Gegenspieler hat ihn gegen den Fuß getreten.  
(The opponent kicked him-ACC against the foot.)  
b. Der Gegenspieler hat ihm gegen den Fuß getreten.  
(The opponent kicked him-DAT against the foot.)

*Für mich ist eher Satz **a** akzeptabel. Wenn man das präpositionale Objekt „gegen den Fuß“ weglässt, bleibt **a** die einzige Lösung.*

*(For me, sentence **a** is more acceptable. If one leaves out the prepositional object "against the foot", **a** remains as the only solution.)*



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- (5) a. Die Frau hat mich ins Gesicht geschlagen.  
(The woman hit me-ACC in the face.)  
b. Die Frau hat mir ins Gesicht geschlagen.  
(The woman hit me-DAT in the face.)

*Hier sind für mich beide Sätze ohne Bedeutungsunterschied akzeptabel.  
(Here both sentences are acceptable for me without difference in meaning.)*