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# The Verb *xvatat'* in Possessive Constructions<sup>1</sup>

*Irina Kor Chahine, Ekaterina V. Rakhilina*

## 1. Introduction

In this article we will consider a number of possessive constructions in which Russian verb *xvatat'* appears to be irregular both from syntactic and semantic point of view.

### *Xvatat'* as a polysemic verb

The verb *xvatat'* displays an unusual correlation of its main meanings. The dictionary gives the first main meaning of *xvatat'* as 'to grab and to keep hold of,' such as *xvatat' za ruku*. It is a physical act which results in the physical contact of a person with an object. The second main meaning of *xvatat'* describes an abstract state or condition, i.e. 'to be sufficient in quantity', see *poka xvataet sil*; or condition in the negative context especially associated with this meaning: *prjanikov sladkix vseгда ne xvataet na vseх* (B. Okudjava).

Therefore we are dealing with a rather unusual, even unexpected, semantic shift typological relevance of which, according to specialists (A.A. Zaliznjak, oral communication) is not so clear. Nevertheless, the cognitive link between both meanings appears to exist because the Russian verb *dostat'* manifests similar combination of meanings: in negative context examples like *(ne) dostaet s polki => ne dostaet znanij* show their symmetrical relation.

While we do not intend to discuss the semantic shift and its nature, we will focus only on the abstract, non physical meaning of *xvatat'*. We will show that in this meaning, the verb *xvatat'* has many special features, some of which become especially apparent in negative context.

### Multiplicity of constructions

The verb *xvatat'* in the meaning of 'state or condition' appears in a large number of syntactic constructions (more see Kor Chahine 2008). Constructions with Dative (we will call it DAT) and constructions with Locative (LOC) are in perfect opposition both syntactically and semantically, e.g:

DAT: *Крестьянам не хватает уборочной техники.*

LOC: *В России не хватает своего газа.*

In the DAT-construction the subject experiences shortage, and the attribute of time and place is omitted, but it is implied in the situation (a sort of deictic

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<sup>1</sup> We thank B. Partee and V. Plungian for discussing the previous versions of this article.

zero). In the construction with Locative, the focus is on the place, and the subject may be any person relevant for the situation in this place. As a rule, such general subject is not expressed (here it is “quantum zero of entity” (*noľ kvantora obščnosti*) with common meaning), see:

DAT: *X-y (не) хватает Y* (‘in this time and this place’)

LOC: (*любому X-y*) (*не*) *хватает Y в Z<sub>Loc</sub>*

Construction with preposition *у*, such as *У X-a (не) хватает Y*, falls in between the Dative and the Locative constructions (see more about semantics of the construction with preposition *у* in Weiss 1999). We will call it POSS for convenience. This construction is indeed close to LOC if the lexical component of *Y* contains a marker of place (as a lexeme *mesto*). If it does not, as in typical attributes of *Y* like *vremja*, *sily*, *den’gi*, POSS appears to be closer to DAT. Thus:

POSS = LOC: *У меня уже не хватает места в холодильнике ≈ Дома уже не хватает места в холодильнике.*

As we can see, in this case *у меня* expresses localization, and the subject who is short on space is dropped and has broad meaning similar to the locative construction.

POSS = DAT: *У меня хватает денег ≈ Мне хватает денег.*

In this case, the prepositional group in POSS appears as a subject, and spatial situation is not obviously marked (like in DAT). In such cases, constructions look quasi synonymous and in many cases it is possible to substitute POSS for DAT or DAT for POSS without marked changes in meaning; see examples of National corpus of Russian <[www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru)> with variations (the slash introduces an artificial example):

- (1) *Впрочем, аналитики как раз отмечали, что при всем масштабе активов "Росхлебпродукта" у компании<sub>POSS</sub> / компании<sub>DAT</sub> не хватает средств для их развития. ["Известия", 2001.10.30]*
- (2) *Когда Буратино<sub>DAT</sub> / у Буратино<sub>DAT</sub> не хватает аргументов, чтобы оправдать свои безобразия, ему помогают Дунаевский и братья Покрасс. ["Итоги", 1996]*

In this article we will focus on the linguistic phenomenon which characterizes the verb *xvatat’*, namely the pair of false synonyms POSS / DAT and riddles dealing with their opposition in particular contexts. We can demonstrate that despite their semantic closeness, in some cases these constructions will be in opposition and will not function as synonyms even when *Y* is expressed by a

lexeme with no locative marker. It is remarkable that the synonymy may gravitate to one or the other side: the construction with DAT may not permit transformation into POSS without rendering it grammatically incorrect, and in rare cases, the construction with POSS may not admit a transfer to DAT.

The following examples (A – D) illustrate this impossibility. In these constructions the initial one is not synonymous to the corresponding one and can not be substituted for it without changing the original meaning. We propose that each case has its own cause of such limitation. The purpose of the article is to give an explanation of these cases:

(A) *Зарплата у меня небольшая, но мне / \*у меня зарплаты хватает.*

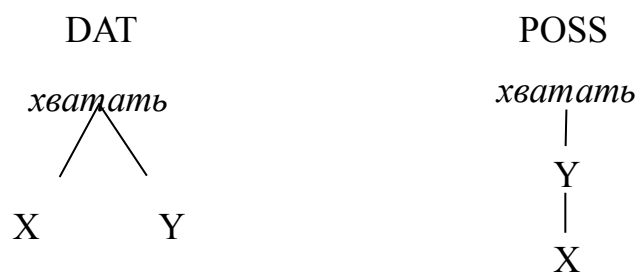
(B) *Знаешь, мне / \*у меня хватает нашей соседки.*

(C) *Ему / \*у него не хватает только шутовского колпака.*

(D) *У него / \*ему не хватает переднего зуба.*

## 2. Syntactic structure

I.M. Boguslavskij (1989) when considering other problems associated with verbs of the same group, as *xvatat'*, supposed that for their description it is necessary to use two different syntactic constructions: with DAT and with POSS. This decision to separate constructions with simultaneous (DAT) and consecutive (POSS) subordination seems to be justified, and we also will follow it (see also Kor Chahine 2008):



It must be noted that in the G.A. Zolotova's *Syntactic dictionary* (1988) only second structure is identified, though the all examples which illustrate it, except one, contain the preposition *у*. In fact, it means that the problem of syntactic opposition between DAT and POSS was not recognized in this monograph.

Nevertheless, the syntactic solution that we have chosen has at least two consequences, one semantic, and one syntactic.

### Semantic consequence

I.M. Boguslavskij (1989) noted that in the consecutive subordination the prototypical Y describes resources in X's possession. Indeed, the consecutive structure can be interpreted as 'Y is sufficient and it belongs to X', i.e. in this case Y must already belong to X and comprises its "resources" which are later deemed to be sufficient or not.

That is why DAT is preferable to POSS in future constructions:

(3) *Нам (у нас) хватает денег, которые обещал РФФИ.*

In this situation the resources are unavailable, there is no money yet (or we need a special interpretation in this type of contexts in which the speaker views the future as a real fact).

Stricter bans seem to appear in the iterative contexts and it is exactly the case in our example A: *mne / \*u menja zarplaty xvataet*. The fact is that the salary is paid every month, that is why in this context we cannot speak about a certain quantity of resources, and the form *xvataet* has an iterative meaning corresponding to the noun:  $\approx$  'each time that the salary is paid it is sufficient'. See the iterative interpretation:

(4) *Выяснилось, что майской зарплаты хватает только на то, чтобы один раз поест в ресторане.*

### Syntactic consequence

If we accept such variations of syntactic structures, we have to admit that Y has different syntactic roles, namely a role of subject in consecutive subordination (i.e. with POSS) and a role of object in simultaneous subordination (i.e. with DAT). The matter is in fact more complicated because the verb governs a genitive that means that we deal with genitive subject (POSS) and genitive object (DAT) respectively. Here in order to proceed we have to provide the semantic interpretation of these syntactic roles.

G.A. Zolotova (1988) is right to consider that the meaning of genitive subject (POSS) is quantitative, similar to constructions with numeral such as *pjatero / mnogo / neskol'ko soldat*, and therefore, it is partitive. It is very important because in POSS-constructions Y stands for quantity of resources and can not be comprised of single objects. Indeed, we say *u menja xvataet deneg*, but we cannot say *\*u menja xvataet doma / Peti* – or see (B) *\*našej sosedki*. Thus, this restriction explains the ban existing in the second (B) of our four examples.

Our example A is particularly interesting from this point of view: *mne / \*u menja xvataet zarplaty*. It seems that the possessive relation in A is different: the salary cannot be found or lost like money. Besides, money may be measured quantitatively (it is a lot, little or very little), while the salary cannot be measured in this manner: there is not much or less salary, as the amount of money comprising it is always fixed (it may be low, middle-range, or high). This fact explains the ban of POSS in the sentence *Mne / \*u menja xvataet (moej trexkomnatnoj) kvartiry*. Even if the apartment belongs to me (see above), the lexeme does not possess the graduate trait. Thus, *zarplata as kvartira / dom / Petja*, will belong to the category of single objects. We noted that POSS constructions can gradually shift to the purely quantitative ones, e.g.

(5) *Водки (в бутылке) хватило на 2 стакана.*

Here the quantitative measure is placed in the new argument *na 2 stakana* and locative X is tending to be omitted (see more about it in Kor Chahine 2002, 121-122).

### 3. Genitive object with the verb *xvatat'* : particular aspects

Let us consider the semantics of genitive object with *xvatat'*. It is obvious that we are dealing with completely different category of cases which can be grouped together with verbs *iskat'*, *žažadat'*, *trebovat'*, *obeščat'* with intentional meaning (Karnap 1959; see also Arutjunova 1989) and no referential object: 'if there are laboratory assistants / salary..., it's enough'.

This confirms what we said earlier about DAT, in particular that this construction works well in the future tense and with non referential iterative contexts. On the other hand, this is also consistent with the semantic aspects of dative case in general, namely, as earlier indicated (Rakhilina 2001, see also Roudet 1999), that in possessive contexts with dative, such as *otec soldatam* or *pamjatnik Puškinu*, we are not talking about actual possession, unlike in genitive constructions (*otec soldata*, *pamjatnik Puškina*), but about so-called potential possession or reference to the potential possessor.

We might expect to observe the so-called "broken down" model of object behavior with the verb *xvatat'* in the DAT-construction. Then if the object is defined and referential, it will be regularly codified by accusative, and if it is non referential, by genitive. This strategy takes place in Russian with some intentional verbs (though not so systematically), as an example we can take the pair *iskat' Petju<sub>Acc</sub>* vs. *iskat' uedinenija<sub>Gen</sub>* where the two cases cannot be "confounded". In modern Russian we cannot say either *\*iskat' Peti<sub>Gen</sub>*, nor *\*iskat'*

*uedinenie*<sub>Acc</sub> because in this case the accusative marks concrete reference of proper noun with its full certainty, and the genitive – intentional interpretation of the situation where the object means an abstract concept (*uedinenie*) and is not referential.

Meanwhile, *xvatat'* (in the sense relevant to this discussion) manifests another, “not decomposed” behavior: this verb does not permit any object other than genitive, and does not prohibit the use of concrete referential nouns as objects, i.e. we can find not only constructions like *xvataet deneg*<sub>Gen</sub> but also ones like *xvataet Peti*<sub>Gen</sub>. Let us point out that in *Mne xvataet Peti* we observe an obvious shift of meaning (and also of its intonation which serves as a marker of this shift for a listener). *Mne xvataet Peti* means ‘to have enough of whims, fights, fancies...’, i.e. not ‘enough’ in the regular sense but ‘too much’. In other words, construction of this kind serves rather to respond to the question ‘may you add more?’ and does not function as a statement of fact like in the common construction *mne xvataet deneg*. In this situation, the proper name changes its meaning: *Petja* (as *naša sošedka* in example B) no longer means a concrete person but only a quantity of features of this person or aspects of his behavior and in that sense does not conflict with the intended interpretation of the sentence. It is clear that in this case the genitive marker is fully justified.

Thus, now we understand not only why the example B with POSS was not acceptable, but also why it was acceptable with DAT: particular aspects of DAT lead to semantic shift of this construction in the context of defined referential object, and this fact assures the admissibility of examples like B.

#### 4. Riddle of negation

On the basis of what we have discussed earlier we can roughly conclude that neither DAT nor POSS “likes” a single object in the Y-position; they prefer quantities. The riddle is that in both constructions a single object is allowed in some cases in this syntactic position, and it happens first of all in negative contexts.

Our hypothesis is that, from the point of view of argument structure, such a name does not fill the Y-position but introduces another argument Y' which, from semantic point of view, serves as a sort of *addition* to the quantity named by Y. It is important that Y' has its own meanings in each construction. This fact explains the substantial difference in the meaning of corresponding examples and, in some cases, the impossibility to change DAT to POSS, as in examples C and D. Let's consider each construction from this point of view.

#### Semantics of Y'–“addition” in DAT

Let's take the sentence *Mne ne xvataet karandaša*. We can approximately paraphrase it as 'I am short of a pencil' or, more formally, like 'if there is a resource Y, it is not enough to accomplish some purpose Q: Y' (a pencil) is also necessary and it is absent so far'.

As a rule, if we add the negation to the *xvataet*'-construction, we deny the sufficiency of the Y-resource, and the pragmatic consequence of this is the wish to add to Y an absent Y' which is insufficient to be called the hypothetical "full-value" resource. It must be noted that the hypothetical full-value resource and the addition to it are not referential and potential by nature, which corresponds with the intentional semantics of the predication as a whole as well as to the semantics of dative and genitive markers of the object.

Another important note is that the alternative construction POSS is impossible in the same intentional sense: *\*u menja ne xvataet karandaša*. We will explicate this case after we have discussed the example C with dative: the latter seems to be a more obvious variation of the sentence with pencil.

Indeed, the sentence C *Emu ne xvataet tol'ko šutovskogo kolpaka* means that the behavior of the man in question is so foolish that to describe him fully, i.e. to create the "full-valued quantity" we spoke about in the previous case, we say that he needs only a fool's cap. Thus, the fool's cap is an addition (Y') to his other stupid aspects (Y).

The particle *tol'ko* in this case not only intensifies situation as a whole but causes a semantic shift, thus allowing us to speak of a group of negative DAT-constructions which can take place only in the context of *tol'ko* (see Boguslavskij 1989). Indeed, like in the previous example, the cap is hypothetical, it is absent, but unlike the pencil in example C, it does not exist and is not necessary for any Q. That is why it is hard to imagine this example continuing with *čtoby* meaning purpose, and even if we found the Q-situation, it would not be goal-oriented but only consequential, hypothetical and unrealizable, with *i možno*: e.g.

- (6) *Ему не хватает только шутовского колпака – и можно в сумасшедший дом.*

Moreover, we cannot say *\*U nego ne xvataet tol'ko šutovskogo kolpaka* and will try to explain now this impossibility.

### **Semantics of Y'"–"addition" (POSS) in opposition with Y' (DAT)**

Let's take the same example but with the other construction: *U menja ne xvataet karandaša*. It looks very natural in the situation of discovered loss or



theft and can be described as:  $\approx$  ‘I have a resource (Y) but it is not sufficient because of missed Y’ which would complete it to the necessary quantity’.

We can see that as with DAT, the definition of this negative sentence must introduce an additive argument Y’ in contrast with the initial positive element Y. In principle, the fact that with some verbs an additive argument may appear in negative context is known from the work by Apresjan 2006, 133-134, see also Eršler 2008. This kind of argument appears particularly with intransitive verbs, usually verbs of motion, which have a verbal prefix *do-*, like *dojti*, *donesti*, *dotjanut’sja*, etc.: *dobežat’ do finiša – ne dobežat’ do finiša poslednix dvux kilometrov* / *\*ne dobežat’ do finiša poslednie dva kilometra*. This fact is well known but it is still an unexplained issue in compositional structure of negative sentences, typology of negation, and other points of view. Moreover our verb *xvatat’* makes it more difficult because it disturbs morphological (prefix *do-*) and semantic (mostly verbs of motion) integrity of this class. However we have to put this issue aside and rely on the empirical evidence that with negation the verb *xvatat’* introduces into its structure an additive argument.

Another problem discussed here is that the semantics of this additive argument changes according to the variant of the governing model with *xvatat’*, i.e. it so happens that POSS and DAT have *different* additive arguments. Indeed, Y’ is not identical with Y’’: the first one might be called “*prospective* addition” of initial resource Y, and the second one – “*retrospective* addition”. The prospective addition joins Y and forms with it a quantity which the subject needs for accomplishing a purpose Q. The retrospective addition completes the “lost” element of Y which in this case does not need to be increased.

From the point of semantic compositionality of the construction, it is of great importance that there is nothing accidental in such understanding of the additive argument. It is motivated by inherent aspects of non-negative DAT and POSS, in particular, by intentional and prospective semantics of dative (hence the prospective addition) on the one hand, and, by the idea of the previous presupposed “resource” (hence the retrospective addition) on the other hand. But it means that in these constructions we speak of the same new argument which predictably changes its meaning under the influence of the described features of the context.

### 5. Impossible constructions

It is clear that in some situations only prospective additions are allowed but not the retrospective ones, and in other situation, only the retrospective ones are allowed and not the prospective one. We observed the first case in example C about a fool’s cap: as the cap does not exist and moreover, as we saw, it is not

needed, the prospective interpretation of the additive argument is quite possible. However the retrospective interpretation is impossible because it will change the meaning of the situation. In this case, it would mean that the real fool's cap is disappeared. So, for C we can admit DAT but not POSS.

The opposite example (the impossibility for the prospective addition) includes the arguments Y which we would call “non-fillable multitudes” or “non-fillable resources”. Among those are some collective parts of objects and, first of all, the collective parts of body. Example D illustrates this case well: it is possible to say *U nego ne xvataet perednego zuba* (POSS) but not *\*Emu ne xvataet perednego zuba*.

The retrospective interpretation here is more natural: the tooth is lost, so its missing justifies the POSS-construction. As for DAT, the construction supposing prospective meaning is not possible because teeth cannot be 35, 40 or 234, their number cannot be intentionally increased. See the similar example from corpus:

- (7) *У него / \*ему не хватает одного зуба, как раз переднего, и от этого он шепелявит.* [Виктор Некрасов. В окопах Сталинграда (1946)].

Another curious “minimal couple” is issued from the corpus database: *Mame ne xvataet moloka – U mamy ne xvataet moloka*. The prospective meaning is available while she was cooking a meal, a mother as the object of situation hadn't found enough or none at all of cow's or goat's milk. See *mame ne xvataet moloka – sbegaj v magazin, požalujsta* or ... *sprosi u sosedki, nel'zja li u nee odolžit' do zavtra*.

But for the situation where the object is human milk of nursing mother, which is in fact a non-fillable resource, the prospective meaning does not work: she does not have the quantity of milk she had before, i.e. her milk became less. Therefore, only the POSS-construction is possible here and its correlate DAT is ruled out.

## 6. Conclusion

The material of this article was focused on four pairs of examples with the verb *xvatat'*. They illustrated particular characteristics of this verb in the context of two types of close constructions: with dative (DAT) and with preposition *u* (POSS), and in particular their interchangeability and preference for one over the other. This article was intended to provide semantic and syntactical explanation of these facts on the basis of analysis of characteristics of DAT and

POSS, both syntactic (for example, absence or presence of subject) and semantic (intentionality, partitivity, prospective and retrospective variant of the meaning of additive argument with negation and others).

However the main purpose of the article was to attract attention of linguists to the puzzles of this unconventional verb. In this paper we could show only a fraction of them, and for many the authors have not yet arrived at a satisfactory solution.

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