

# German Pertinence Datives revisited

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German has many constructions involving non-selected dative-marked NPs. There is little consensus on the functions of these datives (among many others von Polenz 1969, Abraham 1973, Wegener 1983, Neumann 1995, Hole 2008). I argue that the frequently discussed type “pertinence dative” (1) does in fact not exist. Rather, the term describes a subset of the affected experiencers (2) (Bosse et al. 2010) which receives the pertinence interpretation from a conversational implicature.

- (1) *Er klopfte seinem Freund auf die **Schulter**.*  
he tapped his.Dat friend on the shoulder  
‘He tapped his friend on the shoulder.’  
(von Polenz 1969, example 1)

The pertinence dative (underlined in (1)) is usually described as referring to an animate entity which is the “inalienable” possessor of another object (marked in bold) and is affected by the event (von Polenz 1969, Wegener 1983, Neumann 1995, Lee-Schoenfeld 2006). Hole (2008) proposes that the pertinence dative is a combination of two separate dative functions, namely the affected experiencer (2) and the part-whole dative (3). The former must denote an animate entity affected by the event, while the latter establishes a part-whole relation between the dative (underlined) and another entity denoted by another NP (bold). One puzzling aspect about this is that the part-whole dative is dialectal while the pertinence dative is widely attested. Yet, in Hole’s analysis the pertinence dative requires the part-whole dative (and not vice versa).

- (2) *Alex zerbrach Chris Bens Vase.*  
Alex broke Chris.Dat Ben’s vase  
‘Alex broke Ben’s vase on Chris.’  
(Bosse et al. 2010, example 1a)
- (3) *Dem Baum fiel ein Apfel aus dem **Geäst**.*  
the.Dat tree fell an apple out.off the branches  
‘An apple fell out of the tree’s branches.’  
(based on Hole 2008, example 10.24b)

I argue that the hard-wiring of the possessive meaning in German pertinence datives is not necessary. Hole’s approach as well as a possessor raising analysis (as proposed by Lee-Schoenfeld (2006)) are unnecessary. Furthermore, the analysis by Lee-Schoenfeld (2006) relies on a defective D which allows the raising of a possessor to the specifier of vP only in the pertinence dative/possessor raising construction. Thus in (1), *seinem Freund* is generated inside the DP *die Schulter* ([<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> seinem Freund] [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>defective</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> (die) Schulter]]) and is allowed to raise because D is defective. It is not clear what rules this defective D out in other cases such as (4).

- (4) # *Jan sang das Lied.*  
Jan sang the song  
intended ‘Jan sang his song.’

I argue that ‘pertinence dative’ refers to a subset of affected experiencers (2). This subset is characterized by the second NP (bold) being either a body part (1) or clothing. These sentences carry a conversational implicature that there is a possessive relation between the dative and the second NP because of the interaction of the body part/clothing and the affectedness. The easiest way for the friend to be affected in (1) is if it is his own shoulder. As expected, this conversational implicature can be overcome in the right context or by specifying a different possessor: sentence (1) can be extended with *seiner Verlobten* ‘his fiancé’ indicating that it was the fiancé’s shoulder. Thus, the conversational implicature of it being the friend’s shoulder is denied. This new sentence can still be interpreted as affecting the (overly protective) friend; this is the affected experiencer interpretation. Conversely, replacing *Bens* with a determiner in (2) gives the sentence a salient reading of it being Chris’s vase. This conversational implication is stronger in sentences with relational nouns, the “pertinence dative” subtype.

German pertinence datives can be explained straightforwardly as an interaction affected experiencers and conversational implicatures. Their possessive meaning does not have to be hard-wired into the syntactic analysis. Rather, a conversational implicature is used. Certain noun classes (like body parts) induce the conversational implicature of possession more easily than other noun classes. Further similarities between the pertinence dative and affected experiencers include their not-at-issue meaning (for affected experiencers see Bosse et al. 2010). The pertinence dative patterns alike on the crucial tests.

## References

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