On the Syntax of Ditransitive Verbs in Czech

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The internal structure of ditransitives like give or send has been given much attention in the generative literature. Two main approaches to these verbs in English can be distinguished: in the first one, the double object construction (DOC) (1a) is derivationally related to the structure with a dative PP (1b) by an NP-movement accompanied by “dative-case absorption” (Larson 1988) or Preposition Incorporation (Baker 1997). On the other hand, Harley (2002) posits two different underlying structures for the DOC vs. the NP-PP construction. While the DOC is characterized by embedding (under little v) a possessive small clause/PP which takes a goal as its subject and a theme as its object, the latter structure embeds a PP with a theme as its specifier and a goal as its complement.

(1) a. Charles sent Mary a letter.  b. Charles sent a letter to Mary.

1 Thesis

1.1 Two types of ditransitives: Acc ≫ Dat, Dat ≫ Acc

In this paper I show that Czech ditransitive verbs belong to two distinct classes. The first one is represented by the verb in (2a), the second one by the verb in (2b). Rather than positing a unique underlying word order for all Czech ditransitives, I show that both word orders are base-generated, but each of them for a different class of verbs (whereby the constituent order in bold is the base-generated one in the examples below):

(2) a. Karel podřídal Marii svoje plány / ...svoje plány Marii.  
Charles adjusted Mary$_{DAT}$ his plans$_{ACC}$ / ...his plans$_{ACC}$ Mary$_{DAT}$  
‘Charles adjusted his plans to Mary.’

b. Karel poslal Marii dopis. / ...dopis Mariii.  
Charles sent Mary$_{DAT}$ letter$_{ACC}$ / ...letter$_{ACC}$ Mary$_{DAT}$  
‘Charles sent Mary a letter.’

I label the two classes Acc-Dat verbs and Dat-Acc verbs, respectively. While the latter class is to be analyzed in terms of an applicative verbal
head (Marantz 1993), I claim that the former class consists of verbs that have a PP complement with a null preposition which incorporates into the verb (see McFadden (2004) for a similar distinction in German). Even though \( V_{\text{Appl}} \) and the null P assign the same dative morphological case to their arguments, they are associated with distinct \( \theta \)-roles: the benefactive/recipient role (Dat-Acc verbs) versus the path role (Acc-Dat verbs).

1.2 Inherent Dative versus structural Accusative
Furthermore, I argue that non-prepositional Dative is different from non-prepositional Accusative in that the former can be checked only locally (in Spec-Head configuration) while the latter allows long-distance Agree. More generally, I suggest that the Czech Case system is not monolithic: structural Case features like Nom and Acc are different from “inherent” Cases like Dative in terms of Case-checking/Case-assigning configuration requirements and intervention effects.

2 Data and generalizations

2.1 Default word order
Notice that both word orders, Acc before Dat as well as Dat before Acc, are possible in Czech for all ditransitives, as shown in (2). However, in neutral contexts, i.e. contexts where all information is new and equally important, only the Acc \( \gg \) Dat word order is unmarked for the verbs like (2a) while the Dat \( \gg \) Acc word order is unmarked for (2b) verbs. The other order is unexpected in the all-new context in (3) (forced for example by the question “What happened?”). It is associated with the presupposition that the content of the clause is known except for the last argument which represents the prominent/unexpected piece of information:

\(^1\) Kučerová (2007, pp. 17–19) shows that the basic word order in Czech has in fact many possible interpretations with respect to what is understood as new. The only requirement is that new constituents must be aligned to the right edge of the clause. Therefore in the sentence like (3c) the following possibilities arise:

\[
\begin{align*}
(\text{i}) & \quad \text{a. Karel poslal Marii [NEW dopis].} & \quad \text{c. Karel [NEW poslal Marii dopis].} \\
& \quad \text{b. Karel poslal [NEW Marii dopis].} & \quad \text{d. [NEW Karel poslal Marii dopis].}
\end{align*}
\]

In the context created by the question “What happened?” the last interpretative possibility, in which all constituents are new, is chosen.
(3) a. Karel podřídil svoje plány Marii.
    Charles adjusted his plans_{ACC} Mary_{DAT}

b. #Karel podřídil Marii svoje plány.
    Charles adjusted Mary_{DAT} his plans_{ACC}

c. Karel poslal Marii dopis.
    Charles sent Mary_{DAT} letter_{ACC}

d. #Karel poslal dopis Marii.
    Charles sent letter_{ACC} Mary_{DAT}

We can observe the same twofold behavior of ditransitives in out-of-the
blue contexts. For the verb in (4), Accusative before Dative is the word
order associated with the fewest presuppositions. For the verb in (5), Dat
before Acc is the most common (and the fewest presupposition bearing)
word order. The opposite word order is infelicitous because it makes the
last argument contextually prominent with respect to the rest of the clause.

(4) a. Učitel vystavil děti nebezpečí.
    teacher exposed children_{ACC} danger_{DAT}
    ‘The teacher exposed the children to a danger.’

b. #Učitel vystavil nebezpečí děti.
    teacher exposed danger_{DAT} children_{ACC}

(5) a. Petr opravil Lence počítač.
    Peter repaired Lenka_{DAT} computer_{ACC}
    ‘Peter repaired Lenka’s computer.’

b. #Petr opravil počítač Lence.
    Peter repaired computer_{ACC} Lenka_{DAT}

(4b) and (5b) become felicitous if their final constituent represents new or
contextually marked piece of information while the rest of the sentence is
known from the context.

2.2 Constituent fronting under topicalization
Topicalization in otherwise unmarked contexts also divides ditransitive
verbs into two classes: those treating a verb and a dative DP as one
constituent (6) and those treating a verb and an accusative DP as one
constituent (7).
For Dat-Acc verbs, the contrast is not as sharp as for Acc-Dat verbs. In addition, the judgments vary across speakers. This test replicates in Czech the German data where the contrast seems to be much stronger. However, even for German it was reported that some of the starred examples are in fact grammatical, cf. footnote 8 in Mc-Fadden (2004, pg. 106).

2.3 Passivization

Ditransitives also fall into the same two classes according to their behavior under passivization. In an all-new context, the Acc-Dat class of verbs promotes the theme argument in nominative Case into Spec,TP, whereas the Dat-Acc class has the argument in Dative in that position:

a. #Nebepečí byly vystaveny děti.
   danger\textsubscript{DAT,N.SG} were exposed\textsubscript{F.PL} kids\textsubscript{NOM,F.PL}
   ‘The kids were exposed to a danger.’

b. Děti byly vystaveny nebezpečí.
   kids\textsubscript{NOM,F.PL} were exposed\textsubscript{F.PL} danger\textsubscript{DAT,N.SG}
   ‘The kids were exposed to a danger.’

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a. Mamince byl předán velký dort.
   Mom\textsubscript{DAT,F.SG} was given\textsubscript{M.SG} big cake\textsubscript{NOM,M.SG}
   ‘Mom was given a big cake.’

b. #Velký dort byl předán mamince.
   big cake\textsubscript{NOM,M.SG} was given\textsubscript{M.SG} Mom\textsubscript{DAT,F.SG}
I assume that the dative DP in (9a) moves to Spec,TP to satisfy its EPP feature. That a dative DP is in an A-position – and not for example in some higher topic position associated with an A-bar movement – is supported by quantifier-pronoun binding:

\[10\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. Každému dělníkovi, byla dána jeho mzda.} \\
& \quad \text{every worker}_\text{DAT} \text{ was given his payment}_\text{NOM} \\
& \quad \text{‘Every worker was given his payment.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b. *Jejímu majiteli byla dána každá mzda.} \\
& \quad \text{his owner}_\text{DAT} \text{ was given every payment}_\text{NOM}
\end{align*}
\]

It is important to note that the fronted dative DP doesn’t have the canonical properties of a nominative subject. For example, it cannot bind a reflexive possessive \textit{svůj} ‘self’s’ which is normally bound by the subject in Nominative. The fronted theme in Nominative in (8b) has all the canonical subject properties.

2.4 Dative argument obligatoriness

Acc-Dat verbs cannot appear without their dative DP. They become either ungrammatical, as in (11b), or they receive a different, often nonsensical interpretation.

\[11\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. Král podřídal obyvatelstvo synovi a táhl dál.} \\
& \quad \text{king}_\text{NOM} \text{ subordinated inhabitants}_\text{ACC} \text{ son}_\text{DAT} \text{ and moved on} \\
& \quad \text{‘The king subordinated the inhabitants to his son and moved on.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b. *Král podřídal obyvatelstvo a táhl dál.} \\
& \quad \text{king}_\text{NOM} \text{ subordinated inhabitants}_\text{ACC} \text{ and moved on} \\
& \quad \text{‘The king subordinated the inhabitants and moved on.’}
\end{align*}
\]

On the other hand, ditransitives preferring Dat \(\text{\text{\textgtr}}\) Acc word order in neutral contexts and [Verb Theme] fronting under topicalization are always grammatical with missing indirect objects. If a dative argument corresponds to an intended possessor (recipient) of the theme, it is existentially quantified, i.e. interpreted as “somebody”, as in (12).

In contrast, missing datives that correspond to arguments that benefit/suffer from the event described by the verb plus the direct object do not have such an entailment, as shown in (13) and (14):
The contrast between (12) versus (13) and (14) suggests that in addition to the main distinction between Acc-Dat and Dat-Acc verbs, there are two semantic subclasses within Dat-Acc verbs: While verbs like ‘send’ or ‘hand over’ involve a relation between two individuals (and have a recipient meaning), verbs like ‘hold’ or ‘eat up’ involve a relation between an individual and an event denoted by the verb plus its direct object (and have a benefactive/malefactive meaning). This distinction is taken in Pylkkänen (2002) as the distinguishing characteristic of high vs. low applicatives. Pylkkänen argues that high and low applicatives correspond to two distinct syntactic structures, whereby the former merges the applicative head (introducing the applied argument in its Spec) outside of the VP, while the latter merges the applicative head with a direct object before V is merged, i.e. within the VP itself. However, none of the syntactic tests (esp. agentive intransitives formation) shows we need to posit two distinct syntactic positions for the dative argument of Dat-Acc verbs in Czech.
2.5 Productivity and Animacy

Finally, there is a significant difference between the two main classes of ditransitives in terms of their productivity. While Acc-Dat verbs represent a fairly limited class of verbs, with not many more members than those listed below, the Dat-Acc pattern is highly productive. Out of Dat-Acc constructions, those with benefactive/malefactive meaning are the most productive ones. They can be derived on the fly from most verbs in Czech that do not already belong to the other two classes.


Moreover, the Dat-Acc pattern occurs with novel verbs recently coined in the Czech vocabulary like odesemeskovat ‘send in an SMS’, zkomputerizovat ‘computerize’, etc.

Even though Dat-Acc verbs are much more productive, they are compatible only with animate goals. There is no such restriction for Acc-Dat verbs, cf. the animate Dative in (3a) and the inanimate Dative in (4a).

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2 In the broader context of all verbs with a benefactive or recipient Dative, i.e. not only ditransitives that assign Dative to the indirect object and Accusative to the direct object, the only limitation of a dative DP is that it cannot attach to unergative verbs that do not have any complement in addition to their external argument. Thus it is perfectly good to say (ii-a) but not (ii-b):

(ii) a. Karel spí Marii v posteli.
   Charles$_{NOM}$ sleeps Mary$_{DAT}$ in bed$_{LOC}$
   ‘Charles sleeps in Mary’s bed.’
   b. Karel spí Marii.
   Charles$_{NOM}$ sleeps Mary$_{DAT}$
3 Proposal

3.1 Acc-Dat verbs

On the basis of distinctions summarized in 2.1 I propose that Acc-Dat verbs contain a null preposition which checks dative Case on a DP and which is associated with a path θ-role. Since the preposition is phonologically defective, it incorporates into the verbal head taking a PP as a complement, and the whole constituent projects further. I adopt Harley’s 2004 view of a conflation of defective p-sig features (“phonological signature”) of one head into another one under Merge. The mechanism of Conflation proceeds according to the following steps:

1. head X merges with a maximal constituent YP whose label is H(Y)
2. label H(Y) contains ALL the features of Y0, including a copy of its p-sig
3. if X’s or Y’s p-sig is defective (if X or Y has a [+affix] feature), Y’s p-sig is conflated into X’s when X and Y Merge, i.e. the p-sig of Y is merged into the p-sig of X
4. when X projects, the label of the whole constituent H(X) contains Y’s p-sig
5. for Economy reasons, the conflated p-sig is only pronounced once, in its uppermost position

In our concrete case, the projecting verbal head contains the p-sig of V as well as the null Dative-case marking P as noted in the following tree. The lower DP gets its Case checked via Merge with P[Dat], and it becomes inactive for the purpose of further checking.

Even though both the theme and the path argument are introduced within the VP, they differ substantially in the way they get their Case valued. While Dative is assigned to a DP immediately after its merge with P, the introduction of the theme DP and its Case valuation are dissociated. Therefore the theme DP receives an object θ-role first, independently of Case assignment. Only if an active little v is merged subsequently, it probes down for a suitable goal to satisfy its unchecked φ-features in exchange for valuing the accusative Case-feature on an object DP, under Agree of Chomsky (2000; 2001).

(15) Karel podřídil svoje plány Marii.
Charles adjusted his plans_{ACC} Mary_{DAT}
Notice that this approach does not exclude the possibility that some verbs are inherently specified for taking a non-overt dative PP as a complement. Given the limited productivity of Acc-Dat class, this approach seems in fact reasonable. However, this is substantially different from saying that there is a list of verbs in the lexicon inherently specified for assigning dative Case to their complements. McFadden (2004, pg. 112) suggests that verbs are not specified for being able to occur in the configuration with an obligatory dative PP any more than they are specified for being able to have a bare DP complement as in case of simple transitive verbs. Put another way, just as PPs with overt heads can be verbal arguments as in *Put the book *(on the shelf), PPs with null heads but with marked morphological case can do so as well (pg. 115, ibid.). In my analysis of the Acc-Dat group of verbs I agree with McFadden in associating the low dative argument with a PP that has a general directional meaning, here formulated in terms of path. It should be noted, though, that among all predicates that have a path argument in Czech, verbs taking non-prepositional dative represent just a small subset. Typically, path is expressed by an overt PP whereby Gen-, Dat- and Acc-assigning prepositions express direction while Gen and Loc-assigning prepositions express location.

John Bailyn (this volume) proposes that (all?) non-experiencer Datives in Russian are generated below Accusatives and associated with a goal θ-role. In this sense, what Bailyn labels as “goal” would correspond
to “path” in this paper. However, most of the Acc)$\rightarrow$Dat c-command asymmetries that are crucial for Bailyn are not replicated with the corresponding results in case of Czech verbs. This makes it impossible to extend Bailyn’s analysis directly to Czech.

In addition to the word order requirements, the structure proposed in (15) captures the fact that the “low” Datives of Acc-Dat verbs are obligatory as observed in (11). Even though the head that conflates into the verbal chain is not overt, it is of a category P and therefore it has to have a complement. The ungrammaticality of (16a) has to follow from the same principle which excludes (16b):

(16)  
a. *Karel podřídil svoje plány.  
Charles adjusted his plans_{ACC}

b. *Karel položil tu knihu na.  
Charles put the book_{ACC} on

This principle can be encoded simply in terms of a subcategorization N-feature associated with any P, or in terms of unvalued φ-features on the prepositional probe which need to be checked against the DP in its complement. In exchange for getting its φ-features valued, P (overt or null) values oblique Case on the DP. I assume that a null P(ath) head always checks/assigns dative Case. This does not exclude the possibility that there is another phonologically null head that would check, for example, a genitive Case.

3.2 Dat-Acc verbs

What distinguishes Dat-Acc verbs from Acc-Dat verbs is that their accusative argument and the verb form a constituent to the exclusion of the dative argument: The direct object is merged first in an unmarked word order, cf. 2.1, and the indirect object is not obligatory, cf. 2.4. While the low Dative was introduced by a non-overt P before the direct object was merged as discussed in the previous section, I propose that there is also a high Dative position introduced by an applicative functional head which takes the whole VP as its complement.Positing two independent Dative-checking heads is independently supported by the fact that all dative DPs of Dat-Acc verbs have to be animate while there is no such requirement for Datives of Acc-Dat verbs, cf. 2.5. Such a distinction would be unexpected if there were only one Dative in Czech.
The derivation in (17) shows that it is in this case the higher DP that gets its dative Case checked, via Merge with $v_{\text{Appl}}$. Not only does it become inactive for the purposes of further Case checking, but it does not cause a minimality violation either. When the little $v$ is merged, it scans its c-commanding domain in order to satisfy its uninterpretable unchecked $\phi$-features and the first suitable goal it finds is the object DP with unchecked Case features.

(17) Karel poslal Marii dopis.
Charles sent Mary$_{\text{DAT}}$ letter$_{\text{ACC}}$

In order for Agree to apply, two conditions must hold: the goal must be active and it must be local enough. The first requirement is satisfied only by the theme DP because it still has an uninterpretable Case feature to check. The applied argument, on the other hand, got its Case checked under Merge, so it is no longer active for the purposes of Agree. The second requirement, “don’t skip the like”, might seem problematic because both object DPs have Case features. Since the indirect object is closer to little $v$ than the direct object, its Case features should intervene and the derivation should crash, contrary to fact.

I want to put forward that even though both DPs have Case features, they are features of a different type. Dative, as an oblique Case, can be checked only locally – under Merge. Its checking is in each case associated with a specific $\theta$-role (path or benefactive/recipient). The choice of particular role is different according to the different position in the structure in which the Dative-checking head merges, in conformity
with UTAH. So far, we know of two Dative-checking categories in Czech: \(v_{\text{App}}\) and P but in theory, there might be more. Structural accusative Case, on the other hand, can be checked only by little v, and is associated with one broad object \(\theta\)-role, or the proto-Patient role in the sense of Dowty (1991). As a result, the feature specification of the two DPs is different enough not to cause intervention under the Agree-based mechanism of Case-feature checking.

The difference between dative and accusative Case-features is a concrete instantiation of a standard dichotomy between inherent and structural Case introduced in Chomsky (1986). Chomsky (1995, pg. 114) attributes the “structuralness” of Case to the observation that such Case is “assigned solely in terms of S-structure configuration” while Case “inherentness” is associated with \(\theta\)-marking. The reason for this statement is the existence of ECM verbs in English which give rise to the following contrast:

(18) a. John believes [the rumor to be false].
    b. *John’s belief of [the rumor to be false].

While Accusative can be assigned to the external argument of the embedded infinitival clause, Genitive cannot. This contrast is explained by dissociating accusative Case and \(\theta\)-marking. However, it is hard to replicate the data which support such an explanation in a language like Czech, which does not have a genuine case of ECM verbs with infinitival complements (Řezáč 2005, pg. 108). The closest relatives seem to be verbs of perception. However, these verbs should be analyzed according to Řezáč as containing a controlled PRO argument:

(19) Karel viděl Marii_i běžet.
    Charles saw Mary\(_{\text{ACC}}\) PRO\(_{\text{ACC}}\) run

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1Both Dative and Accusative can be assigned also by overt prepositions in Czech. I assume that in these cases both Cases are oblique.
2McGinnis (2001, pg. 23) makes an assumption that direct object checks Case on applicative head, to obviate the locality violation, while the indirect object checks Case on v. It is not clear how she would then account for the different morphological cases on the two arguments we observe in Czech (although she could be right for Bantu languages).
It seems that the direct object is associated with an object θ-role in Czech. But even in Czech we find data showing that this role is not bound to the direct object. Under passivization, what was the direct object in accusative Case becomes the subject in Nominative while keeping its object θ-role:

(20) a. Petr miluje Lenku.
    Peter\textsubscript{NOM} loves Lenka\textsubscript{ACC}
    ‘Peter loves Lenka.’

b. Lenka je (Petrem) milována.
    Lenka\textsubscript{NOM} is Peter\textsubscript{INST} loved
    ‘Lenka is loved (by Peter).’

In contrast, the indirect object keeps not only its θ-role but also its dative Case under passivization:

(21) a. Petr poslal Lence milostný dopis.
    Peter\textsubscript{NOM} sent Lenka\textsubscript{DAT} love letter\textsubscript{ACC}
    ‘Peter sent Lenka a love-letter.’

b. Lence byl (Petrem) poslán milostný dopis.
    Lenka\textsubscript{DAT} was Peter\textsubscript{INST} sent love letter\textsubscript{NOM}
    ‘Lenka was sent a love-letter (by Peter).’

Therefore I agree with Chomsky (1995) that structural Case is defined solely in terms of a structural configuration: Agree with little v for Accusative, Agree with T for Nominative, as in Chomsky (2001). I propose that what makes inherent Case special is also a structural characteristic, namely its limitation to a local Case-checking relationship (it is restricted to Merge). The fact that non-prepositional Accusative is always associated with an object θ-role in Czech while an inherent Case like Dative can be associated with more than one type of θ-role is a by-product of the different Case-checking configurations rather than their defining feature. There is only one category that checks (structural) Accusative but there are more categories that check (inherent) Dative.

In this debate I assume that θ-roles are reflexes of syntactic configurations – rather than formal features of its own, see Lasnik (1995, pg. 621), Lasnik (1999, pg. 124), and Hornstein (2001, pg. 20) for the discussion. Since θ-roles are assigned only under Merge, as well as inherent Case, it is a natural state-of-the-art that the assignment of the two
coincides. However, nothing makes the two interdependent. We expect to find cases of θ-marking without an inherent Case-valuation, and we also expect to find cases where the inherent Case is valued, without a θ-role being assigned. The former case is represented by big V that merges with an object DP. V does not have a capacity to value Case on a DP but their merge is standardly associated with an object θ-role on a DP. The latter case when the inherent Case valuation is not accompanied by a θ-assignment is discussed in Dvořák (2009) in relation to nominalizations.

The passivization data in (21) follow from our assumption about structural versus inherent Case checking. It is well known that passivization suppresses two things, both associated with the little v: accusative Case and external θ-role assignment, cf. Burzio’s Generalization (1986). The different morphology on a passive verb (the -n/t- morpheme attaching to a verbal stem in Czech) is a sign that we are dealing with a different light verb than in the active structure. Since Accusative requires an active, non-defective v, i.e. the one that assigns a subject θ-role to a DP in its specifier, it cannot be checked by a non-active v which does not fulfill this requirement. Notice that the external argument is realized as an adjunct by-phrase (Instrumental in Czech) under passivization. Therefore the internal argument receives an object θ-role (under Merge with V) but it has to check its Case elsewhere. The only available Case-checking head that is still active is T, so it values its φ-features against the object DP in exchange for valuing the DP’s Case as Nominative.

Dative, on the other hand, is checked under Merge with V_{Appl} (inherently) so it becomes impossible for this DP to undergo further Case checking, cf. McGinnis (1998, pg. 64). This does not exclude the possibility that it undergoes movement for different reasons, namely to satisfy EPP features on T. My approach predicts that the two features standardly associated with T, EPP and φ/Nom, can be checked separately. EPP, as a strong feature, requires the movement of the topmost N-element to Spec,TP; φ-features, in contrast, can be checked at a distance, against the closest accessible DP with unchecked Case.5

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5It is also possible that there are two separate T-like heads in Czech, one of them associated with EPP, the other one responsible for Nominative case.
4 Conclusion

The most important point of the presented paper is that the answer to the question of whether Dat ≫ Acc or Acc ≫ Dat is the base order for Czech ditransitives depends on the nature of the verb involved. This is what distinguishes the proposal from many alternative proposals. If Czech ditransitive verbs have one of the two base-generated structures in (15) and (17), distinguished by a type of a complement selected by the verb, the word order preference in neutral context, under topicalization and passivization follow naturally.

It was proposed that there are two classes of ditransitives in Czech on account of the two types of Dative-checking configuration: low Dative assigned by a non-overt P present in Acc-Dat verbs, and high Dative assigned by v\textsubscript{App} present in Dat-Acc verbs. However, neither of the two types of dative arguments hinges on the presence of an accusative DP in the structure. Low Dative is assigned even before the direct object DP is merged, and the high one is assigned after VP is formed for which v\textsubscript{App} is subcategorized. Therefore, we would expect to find the two Datives independently of their co-occurrence with Accusatives in a double object structure. The elaborated version of this paper (cited as Dvořák (2009)) evinces that the two Dative-checking categories proposed for Czech are not limited to ditransitive verbs with a direct object in Accusative. It turns out that they are present also in unaccusative structures as well as in transitive structures with only a dative object.

References


