Non-canonical constructions with reflexive possessives in Russian: u-possessor constructions*

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Abstract

Our paper focuses on the Russian expression *svoj*. Many authors argue that it should be divided into two lexemes: a reflexive possessive that must be locally bound and an adjective. However, while some cases are clear, the others became a source of controversy.

This problem has never been analyzed in a corpus study. In this paper, we examined a corpus sample of the sentences with nominative *svoj*. We showed that examples with external possessors with *u*-PPs are the most frequent in this set and analyzed them in more detail.

Two types of such constructions with partly different properties are identified. In sum, we concluded that *svoj* does not occupy the syntactic position of the possessor in the NP and does not express a possessive relation semantically. Rather, it acts as a clause-level adjectival predicate, and its meaning is similar to that of the English *different*.

Keywords: binding, reflexives, corpus study

Неканонические конструкции с возвратным притяжательным местоимением в русском: конструкции с у-поссесором

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Аннотация

Наша статья посвящена русскому выражению *свой*. Многие исследователи полагают, что за ним стоят две лексемы: посессивное рефлексивное местоимение, которое требует локального связывания подлежащим, и прилагательное. Однако, хотя многие примеры легко отнести к одной или другой группе, целый ряд случаев вызывает горячие споры.

Так как эта проблема никогда не рассматривалась в рамках корпусного исследования, мы провели таковое в этой работе. Мы проанализировали выборку примеров, в которых*свой* стоит в именительном падеже. Самой частотной конструкцией в этой выборке оказались предложения с внешним поссессором, который вводится предлогом *у*. Поэтому мы изучили их более детально.

Мы показали, что такие конструкции можно разделить на два типа с частично разными свойствами. В целом же мы заключили, что *свой* в таких конструкциях не может занимать синтаксическую позицию поссессора. Семантика его также не сводится к посессивной. Скорее он является аналогом английского слова *different*.

Ключевые слова: связывание, рефлексивы, корпусное исследование

1 Introduction

In this paper, we focus on the Russian expression *svoj*. In many sentences, like (1), *svoj* is clearly used as a reflexive possessive pronoun that is locally bound by the nominative subject (in terms of Binding Theory both in its canonical formulation of Chomsky (1981, 59) or later revisions, e. g. Reinhart and Reuland (1993); Reuland (2011) among others.

(1) Nikto   ne znal svoix   ocenok
     nobody.NOM NEG knew svoj.GEN marks.GEN
     'Nobody$_i$ knew their$_i$ marks.'

Locality restrictions can be demonstrated by examples (2), discussed by Rappaport (1986) and later by Grashchenkov and Grashchenkova (2006) and other authors. *Svoj* can be bound only within the minimal finite clause containing it.

(2) a. Vanja   znaet, <chto Volodja   ljubit [svoju   sestru]>.
         Vanja.NOM knows that   Volodja.NOM loves svoj.ACC sister.ACC
         'Vanja$_i$ knows <that Volodja$_j$ loves *his$_i$ /his own$_j$ sister>.'

     b. Professor   poprosil assistenta   <PRO chitat' svoj   doklad>.
         professor.NOM requested assistant.ACC   to-read svoj.ACC report.ACC
         'The professor$_i$ asked his assistant$_j$ <PRO$_j$ to read his own$_{i,j}$ report>.'

Example (3) from Rappaport (1986) further shows that *svoj* can be bound only by the nominative subject.

(3) My   dovezli rebenka   do svoego   doma.
     we.NOM took   child.ACC to svoj.GEN home.GEN
     'We$_i$ took the child$_j$ to our$_i$/*his$_j$ home.'

At the same time, there are sentences in which these restrictions are violated, as in (4) analyzed by Paducheva (1983). In this example, the nominative subject clearly does not act as the antecedent.

(4) On   postavil veschi   na svoi   mesta.
     he.NOM put   stuff.ACC on svoj.ACC places.ACC
     'He put stuff in its proper place.'

Rather than concluding that binding options are totally different in (3) and (4), various authors argued that *svoj* is not always used as a reflexive possessive pronoun (Paducheva, 1983; Testelets, 2015; Zubkov, 2018; Rappaport, 1986). Thus, Testelets (2015) suggested dividing *svoj* into two lexemes, anaphoric and adjectival, which is not bound. The most detailed analysis of the meanings of non-anaphoric *svoj* is presented by Paducheva (1983). It is summarized in the next section.

The problem is that it has always been very difficult to decide which sentences with *svoj* involve proper binding, in which *svoj* is a free anaphor that can be semantically bound by the ARB operator or used logophorically, and in which cases we must admit that *svoj* is not an anaphor, but an adjective. Bailyn (2003) analyzed some sentences with *svoj* in nominative NPs, like (5a) or (5b), claiming that they involve binding.

(5) a. U Petrovyx   byl svoj   dom
         at Petrovs.GEN was svoj.NOM house.NOM
         'Petrovs have their own house.'

     b. Mashe$_i$ nravitsja svoja$_i$ rabota.
         Masha.DAT appeals   svoj.NOM job.NOM
         'Masha$_i$ likes her$_i$ job.'

Bailyn (2003) suggested that in such cases, the non-nominative XP occupies the specifier of TP, which makes it 'subject-like' in some respects and allows it to bind *svoj* inside the nominative NP that remains low in the syntactic tree. Similar accounts can be found in (Babyonyshev, 1997; Lavine, 1998; Lavine and Freidin, 2002), where various examples in which the nominative NP does not raise to the specifier of TP are analyzed. Slioussar (2011) developed an alternative account, arguing that *svoj* is not anaphoric in such cases. Analyzing the particular sentences in (5a) and (5b), she concluded that *svoj* means 'own, private' in them. All these authors used their conclusions to make more far-reaching claims about Russian syntax (which XPs can occupy the specifier of TP, which positions are available for the nominative subjects, etc.), which made the discussion a topic of wider interest.

However, by looking at several isolated examples we cannot get a general picture. Even if Slioussar (2011) was right about (5a) and (5b), there may be other sentences with *svoj* inside the nominative NP that could be more readily explained by binding. To explore what naturally occurring examples look like, we conducted a corpus study.

Two samples were analyzed. The first one was obtained from SynTagRus (Diachenko et al., 2015; Droganova et al., 2018). We extracted all sentences with *svoj* inside the nominative NP. The majority of examples contained external possessors, or *u*-PP, as in (5a), and we obtained a second corpus sample from the Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru) to analyze the properties of these sentences in more detail.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a detailed semantic account of *svoj*, on which we based our analysis. Section 3 provides the information about the data we collected. Section 4 highlights certain characteristics of the constructions in question. Section 5 shows how our observations correlate with existing theories of possessivity in Russian. Section 6 concludes.

2 Paducheva: Six Types of *Svoj*

All authors who draw a distinction between anaphoric and adjectival *svoj* assume that their semantics is different: while the former is simply a reflexive possessive pronoun, the latter has additional semantic components like 'private', 'own', 'special' etc. Paducheva (1983) divides *svoj* into six semantic types. We do not argue that these types are either necessary, or sufficient, but this is definitely the most detailed account. So we briefly review it in this section, since we are going to look for semantic indicators of non-anaphoricity while analyzing our corpus samples. Summarizing the results of this analysis in the discussion section, we will formulate our own intuitions on the semantics of non-anaphoric *svoj*.

$Svoj_1$ has the basic meaning of a reflexive possessive pronoun. $Svoj_2$ is similar to *own*, it underlines that the possessum is owned by the antecedent and not by someone else, as in (6). $Svoj_2$ also expresses permanent possession as opposed to temporal.

(6) a. Mne   tol'ko svoi   pirogi   nravjatsja.
       me.DAT only   svoj.NOM pies.NOM appeal
       'I like only my own pies.'

    b. U menja   ne   bylo svoix   uchebnikov.
       at me.GEN NEG was svoj.GEN textbooks.GEN
       'I did not have my own texbooks.'

$Svoj_3$ expresses distributive semantics such that every antecedent has its own possessum, as in (7). $Svoj_3$ is often used with universal quantifiers, as will be shown in section 4.

(7) U promyshlennosti – svoj   plan,   u torgovli   – svoj.
    at industry.GEN   svoj.NOM plan.NOM at trade.GEN   svoj.NOM
    'Industry has its plan, trade has its own.'

$Svoj_4$ and $svoj_5$ are related to $svoj_3$, though opposed to each other. $Svoj_4$ describes a unique element of an unmentioned set, as in (8), while $svoj_5$ refers to a proper or typical element, as in (8b).

(8) a. Ja   idu svoim   putem.
      I.NOM go svoj.INS route.INS
      'I'm going my own way.'

    b. On   postavil veschi   na svoi   mesta.
       he.NOM put   stuff.ACC on svoj.ACC places.ACC
       'He put stuff in its place.'

Svoj$_6$ bears almost an idiomatic meaning; it means 'relative' or 'close', considering personal relationships, as in (9). It is mainly used with the word *chelovek* 'person'.

(9) Kto   tam? – Svoi.
    Who there   svoj.NOM.PL
    'Who's there? – Your people.'

This semantic classification is a starting point of our semantic descriptions of the contexts that we discuss in the next sections.

3   Data

The data for the current study were collected from the Russian National Corpus.[1] We used the main subcorpus and SynTagRus, a syntactically annotated corpus of Russian (Diachenko et al., 2015; Droganova et al., 2018). Firstly, we extracted from SynTagRus all examples with nominative *svoj* to use them as a benchmark. They are presented in Figure 1.

Although examples with dative experiencers, like (5b), are most often analyzed in the syntactic literature, no such sentences were found. Figure 1 shows that the most common construction with nominative *svoj* has a PP with the preposition *u* 'at', as in (5a) repeated in (10). Such constructions are often called "constructions with external possessors". The number of such contexts is twice as large as the second top variant, a construction with the preposition *v* 'in'.

(10) U Petrovyx   byl svoj   dom
     at Petrovs.GEN was svoj.NOM house.NOM
     'Petrovs have their own house.'

Notably, the contexts with the spatial prepositions, such as *v* 'in', *na* 'on', *dlja* 'for', are often very similar in meaning to the possessive constructions with *u* 'at', as is shown in (11a) and (11b).

(11) a. No v Rossii   svoja   specifika
      but in Russia.LOC svoj.NOM specificity.NOM

    b. No u Rossii   svoja   specifika
       but at Russia.GEN svoj.NOM specificity.NOM
       'But Russia has its own specifics.'

Other spatial adjuncts with adverbs *zdes'* and *tut* 'here' are semantically similar to PPs with *v* 'in' and *na* 'on'. These adverbs can be replaced with the prepositional phrase *v etom meste* 'lit.: in this place', which, in its turn, can often be replaced with the *u*-PP *u etogo mesta* 'lit.: at this place', indicating that the place in question has certain characteristic properties. Let us stress that such sentences are not fully synonymous, but often express similar meanings. In a similar vein, Tsedryk (2017) suggests that constructions with locative PPs and *u*-possessors should receive a similar syntactic treatment.

Thus, we argue that most contexts with nominative *svoj* form a continuum in which the majority of constructions resemble external or predicative possessors (in a broad sense), and only a small part

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[1]The research was conducted using the Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru).
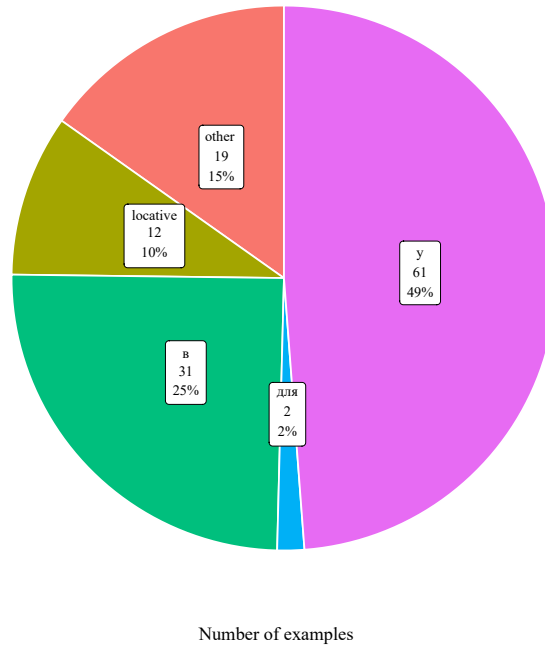
Figure 1: Possible types of "possessors"

deviates from this pattern. Since sentences with *u*-possessors were the most frequent in our sample, we focused on this construction to analyze it in more detail. In particular, we looked for various indicators of anaphoric or non-anaphoric uses of *svoj*.

For these purposes we obtained the second corpus sample through the search in the main subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus. The query aimed to capture all sentences that had possessors with the preposition *u* 'at' and a nominative *svoj*. Then, we combined the examples that came from SynTagRus and those that came from the main subcorpus of the RNC. The total sample consisted of 452 examples. The examples from the main subcorpus were syntactically processed via the `deeppavlov` library for Python (Burtsev et al., 2018), while for SynTagRus, the native UD markup was used.

After manual data filtering, for every context we extracted the head of *svoj* and the whole NP it is part of, the possessor NP and the root of the sentence, i.e. the main verb in the clause. Since UD annotators do not provide the null copula as a root (no tags can be assigned to phonologically zero elements), it was important to manually annotate the root in such sentences. An example of the primary markup is presented in Table 1. After we fixed markup errors, we turned to lemmatization using the `pymorphy` library for Python (Korobov, 2015).

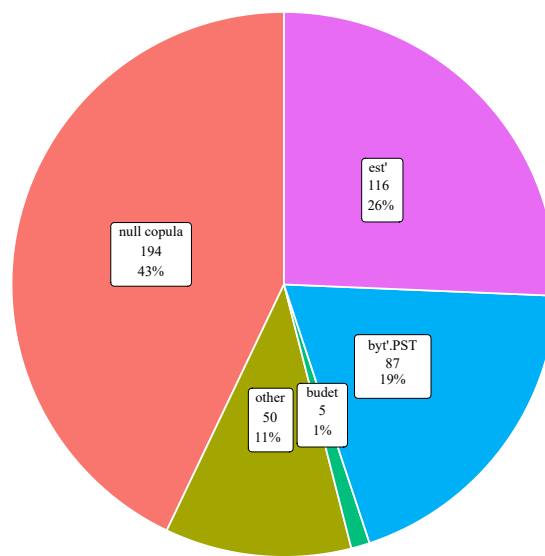| sentence	own_np	own_head	root	poss
Ne iskljucheno odnako, chto u Andreja Astaf'jeva est' svojo predpolozhenije na sej schet	svojo predpolozhenije na sej schet	predpolozhenije	est'	u Andreja Astaf'jeva

Table 1: Example of annotation

5

4 Constructions

In the present section, we go over different criteria that may be important for the classification of examples with nominative *svoj*. We examine clause heads (overt or zero copulas or other matrix verbs), types of NPs serving as complements of the preposition *u*, and the acceptability of omitting *svoj* (i.e. whether a parallel construction without *svoj* is possible). Our observations are mainly descriptive.

4.1 General Characteristics

The overall comparison between clause heads is shown in Figure 2. The null copula is the most frequent head, and its overt counterpart *jest'* 'be.PRS' takes the second place. The past forms of the existential verb are just under the present forms, while other verbs are relatively rare. So, the most common predicate with *u*-possessors is either overt or null existential verb.
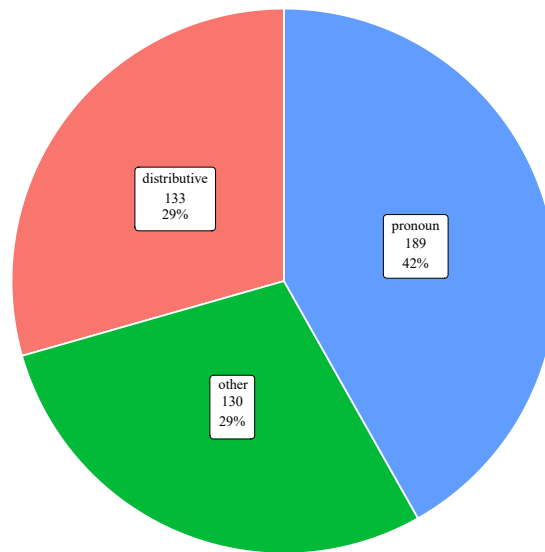

Number of examples

Figure 2: Clause heads in the contexts with nominative *svoj* and *u*-possessors

As for *u*-possessors, in nearly half of the cases they are personal pronouns, as Figure 3 shows. In another one third of the cases, the possessor is distributive, i. e. it contains *kazhdyj* 'every', distributive *vse* 'all' or *vsjakij* 'any'.[2] Personal pronouns indicate that possessors are topical (which is in general characteristic for external possessors), but do not tell us anything about the syntactic properties of the sentences, while distributivity is often associated with non-anaphoric uses of *svoj*.

Now let us turn to the NPs containing *svoj*. Looking at a wider range of contexts in which *svoj* is used, we can note that in some cases, it can be omitted, i.e. parallel derivations with and without *svoj* that express nearly the same meaning are possible. Let us first consider example (12) without a *u*-possessor. We can see that the possessive relationship is established even in the absence of *svoj* in such cases.

(12) On   pozhertvoval (svojej)   zhizn'ju
      he.NOM   sacrificed   svoj.INS   life.INS
      'He sacrificed his life.'

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[2]*Vse* is not a distributive pronoun per se, however, it can be used distributively in contexts such as *U vsex detej jest' podarok* (at all children be.PRS present) 'Every child has a present'.

Figure 3: Types of *u*-possessors

Prima facie we might have expected that in sentences with *u*-PPs, omitting *svoj* would usually be possible because the possessive relationship is already signalled by the external possessor. But, as we demonstrate below, this is not the case. Moreover, the possibility of parallel derivations depends not on the availability of possessive interpretation, as in (12) — it is always readily available with *u*-PPs — but on other semantic properties of the sentence.

Thus, we assessed whether parallel derivations without *svoj* are possible for all examples in our corpus sample (to do so, we relied on our introspection). The results are summarized in Figure 4. In some cases, it is also possible to replace *svoj* with *jego* 'his', but these examples are few, so we limited ourselves to only two types of constructions.

In Figure 4, the tag *possible* stands for the cases in which two derivations (with and without *svoj*) mean the same. The tag *impossible* stands for the cases in which the absence of *svoj* leads either to ungrammaticality, or to a change in semantics or pragmatics of the sentence, as in (13). Here, the first variant, that with *svoj*, means that *he* has merits different from the other people's, perhaps not conventional ones. The second variant, that without *svoj*, means that *he* has some merits, but it is not specified which in particular, and whether they are different from other people's. It is evident from this example that what *svoj* adds to the interpretation is not the possessive meaning. More cases will be analyzed below.

(13) a. U nego est' svoi dostoinstva
at him.GEN is svoj.NOM merits.NOM
'He has his own merits.'

b. U nego est' dostoinstva
at him.GEN is merits.NOM
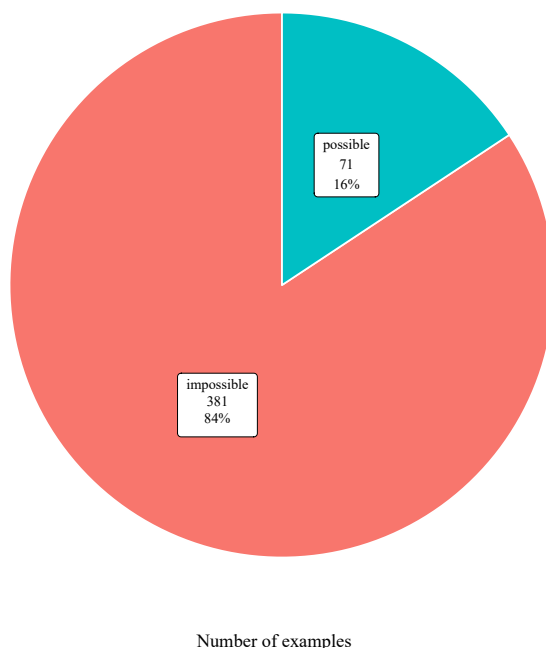'He has merits.'

Number of examples

Figure 4: Acceptability of replacing *svoj* with a zero

4.2   *Svoj*/Zero Alternation

As Figure 4 shows, *svoj* does not alternate with zero in the majority of sentences with *u*-PPs. An example is given in (14a). This does not depend on the NP — in (12) above, the same noun *zhizn'* 'life' is used, and parallel derivations with and without *svoj* are possible.

(14)   a.   U nix   *(svoja)   zhizn'
            at them.GEN svoj.NOM life.NOM
            'They have their own life.'

Now let us compare (14a) to an example with a *u*-possessor that allows for *svoj*/zero alternation (15). Although such sentences are not completely homogeneous, they share some common features. Figure 5 demonstrates that they strongly tend to have an overt copula in contrast to the first group where copula is null in half of the cases.

(15)   U oboix fil'mov   byl (svoj)   nepovtorimyj stil'
       at both   movies.GEN was svoj.NOM unique.NOM   style.NOM
       'Both movies had their own unique style.'

Another difference between the two groups is in the average number of words in the NPs containing *svoj*, as Figure 6 shows. We ran a t-test that showed that the average length of these NPs is significantly greater in those contexts in which *svoj*/zero alternation is possible (p-value is less than 0.05). We will explain why this property is relevant in the next section.

As for the semantic types of the possessors, no differences were found between the two groups, as Figure 7 shows. The proportion of distributive possessors is almost the same across the two groups, and personal pronouns are a bit more frequent when *svoj*/zero alternation is impossible.
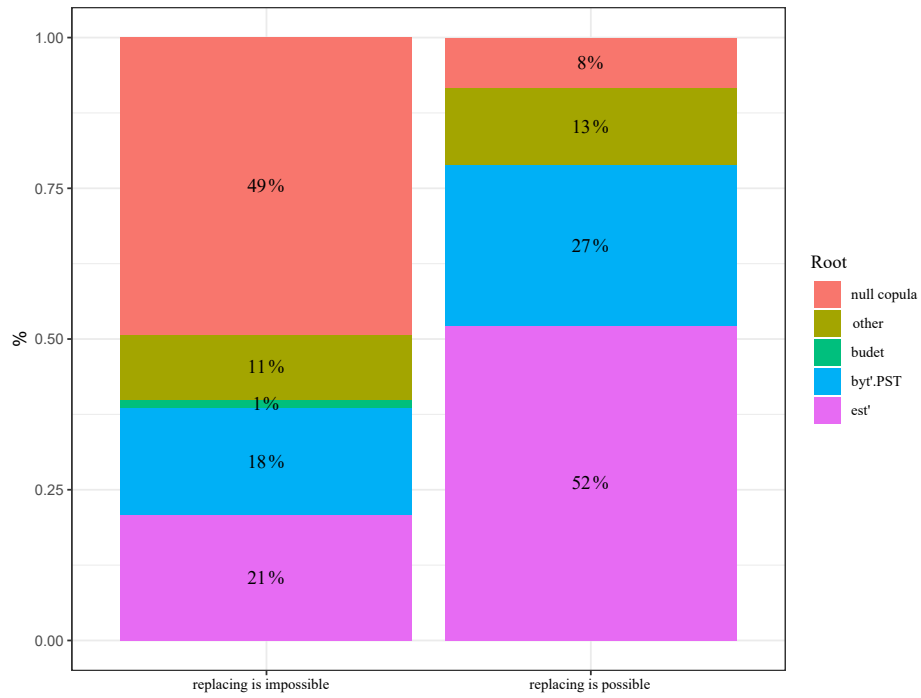
Figure 5: Clause heads by the acceptability of replacing *svoj* with a zero
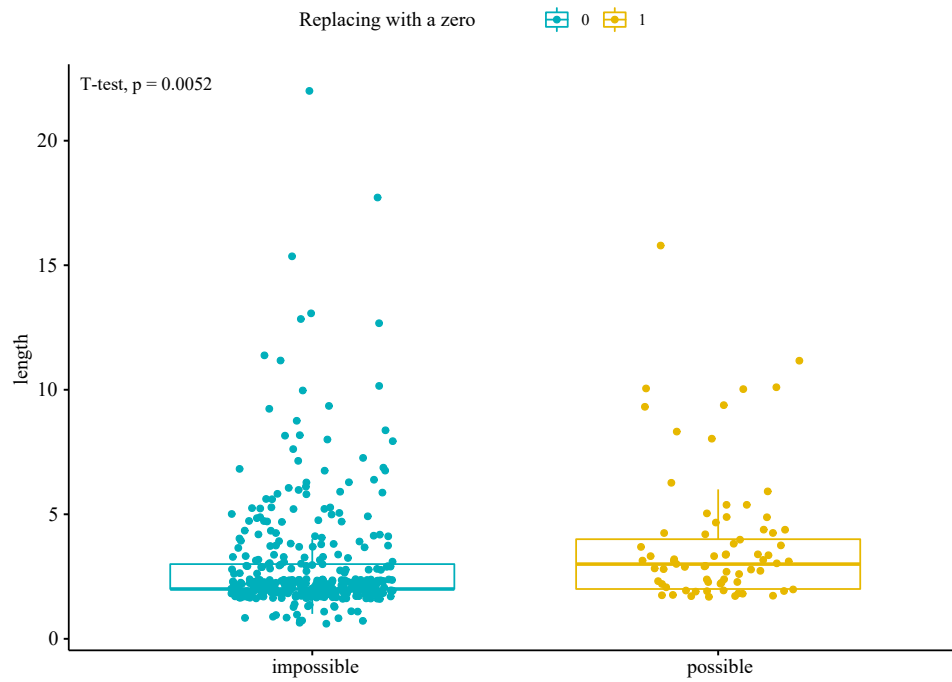
Figure 6: Average number of words in the NP by the acceptability of replacing *svoj* with a zero
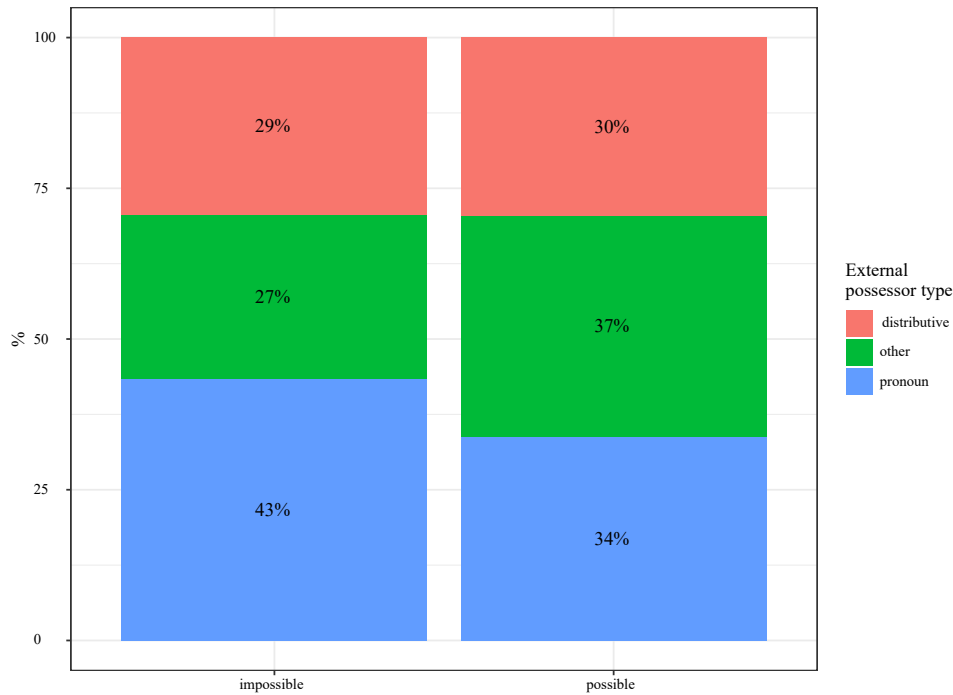
Figure 7: Types of *u*-possessors by the acceptability of replacing *svoj* with a zero

4.3 Summary

We have shown that *u*-possessives with the nominative *svoj* tend to combine with the existential verb in different forms. The nominative *svoj* in such constructions often takes universal quantifiers or personal pronouns as the antecedent. In some cases, parallel derivations without *svoj* are possible. In those sentences, the copula is often phonetically null and the NP itself is longer than in the cases where no parallel derivations exist.

5 Discussion

In the present section, we discuss how our observations correlate with the existing theories of possessivity in Russian, and how the semantics of *svoj* can be modelled.

5.1 Construction Types

U-possessors in Russian have been analyzed by several authors (Arylova, 2013; Rivero and Savchenko, 2003; Tsedryk, 2017). Thus, Rivero and Savchenko (2003) propose that external *u*-possessors are constructed as semantic topics, introduced by a high Applicative phrase. They further assume that the *u*-PP can be interpreted either as a possessor, or as the causer.

Arylova (2013) is the most relevant for our study. Arylova suggested to divide possessive constructions with the verb *byt'* 'to be' into three major groups. The first two types (namely, copular and existential) are predicative possessive constructions. In those, a possession relation must hold between the *u*-PP and the whole NP. In the existential *be*-possessives, the relation of possession constitutes the main assertion of the clause, so the possessum is not presupposed. In the copular *be*-possessives, the possession relation is presupposed (Arylova, 2013, 29).

The most notable formal difference between these two types of possessives is the form of the verb (Arylova, 2013, 29). In the existential *be*-possessives, the verb *byt'* 'to be' is spelled out as *jest'* in the affirmative present tense sentences, while in the copular *be*-possessives, *byt'* is phonologically null (cf.

16a and 16b).

(16) a. U menja   *(jest') den'gi
         at me.GEN is   money.NOM
         'I have money.'

     b. U nee   (*jest') sinie   glaza.
         at her.GEN are   blue.NOM.PL eyes.NOM.PL
         'She has blue eyes.'

Notably, (17) without an adjective is ungrammatical. We suppose that this can be explained by the properties of copular possessives outlined above. The relation of possession is already presupposed in such sentences, so, if no adjective is present, no new information is provided.

(17) *U nee   glaz-a.
      at   her.GEN eyes.NOM.PL
      'She has eyes.'

The third type of *u*-possessives is an external possession construction, where a possession relation holds only between a part of the NP (typically, the head) and the *u*-PP, while modifiers are interpreted as clause-level predicates. Following Paykin and Van Peteghem (2003, 332)), Arylova (2013, 157) notes that these constructions can be confused with copular *be*-possessives (18a). However, unlike the latter, they allow not only for the `u-PP Adj N`, but also for the `N u-PP Adj` word order, as in (18b).

(18) a. U nee   teploje pal'to
         at her.GEN warm   coat.NOM
         'Her coat is warm.' or 'She has a warm coat.'

     b. Pal'to   u nee   teploje
         coat.NOM at her.GEN warm
         'Her coat is warm.'

We can conclude that in our corpus sample, all three types of constructions are attested. In the present tense, phonologically null copula is much more frequent than overt *jest'*, so copular *be*-possessives or external *be*-possessives prevail. In line with Arylova's analysis, we argue that the possession relation is topical in these sentences and the semantics of *svoj* is not possessive: it behaves as a clause-level adjectival modifier meaning 'unique', 'own', 'private' etc.

This explains why *svoj*/zero alternation is rarely possible in such examples. If *svoj* is the only modifier in the possessum NP, omitting it does not simply change the interpretation of the sentence, but makes it ungrammatical, as in (14a) above. We suggest that the explanation is the same as in (17). This stresses once again the non-anaphoric nature of *svoj*.

Some sentences with overt copula do allow for *svoj*/zero alternation, but even in these examples, the situation is not the same as in (12). When *svoj* is the only modifier, a parallel sentence without it has a different meaning (because the meaning of *svoj* is not purely possessive, as in (12)). In many sentences where alternation is possible, the possessum NP contains various adjectives that are close in meaning to the non-anaphoric *svoj*. Combinations like *svoj sobstvennyj* 'svoj own', *svoj nepovtorimyj* 'svoj unique', *svoj avtorskij* 'svoj author's', etc. are common. This is why the possibility of *svoj*/zero alternation correlates with the length of the possessum NP.

5.2 Multiple Possessors

No approach to *u*-possessors allows for two possessors within a clause referring to a single person, which is another reason to question the nature of *svoj* as a possessive element. We admit that there can be two

different positions for possessors within the NP in Russian as illustrated in (19a).[3] Here, Petja is the primary possessor (or the author) and Vasja is the secondary (temporary) possessor. Examples like (19a) are not felicitous for all speakers, but the version where the temporary possessor is external is much better (19b).

(19) a. Ja   prochital Petinu   knigu   Vas-i
            I.NOM read   Petja's.ACC book.ACC Vasja.GEN
            'I read Petya's book of Vasya.'

        b. U Vasi   est' Petina   kniga
            at Vasja.GEN is Petja's.NOM book.NOM
            'I have Petja's book.'

We argue that even the possibility of two possessors within one NP does not allow *svoj* to be generated as one of possessors in that NP. Consider (20).

(20) U Peti   svoja   Vasina   mashina a u Mashi   — svoja
      at Petja.GEN svoj.NOM Vasja's.NOM car.NOM and at Masha.GEN   svoj.NOM
      'Petja has one of Vasja's cars, and Masha has another.'

This sentence can be uttered when both Petja's and Masha's cars are broken, and Vasja has a lot of cars which he allowed them to borrow. Now, Petja has his own Vasja's car, and Mash has her own. In (20) Vasja is interpreted as a primary possessor and Petja and Masha – as secondary possessors. Thus, there is no possessor role for *svoj*, and we conclude that syntactically, *svoj* is not a possessor. This also explains the fact that *svoj* in our sample cannot be replaced with possessive pronouns like *jego* 'his'.

5.3 *Svoj* as Different

We can also conclude that the semantics of *svoj* in *u*-possessor constructions is not possessive. But can different semantic nuances that we identified in this study receive a unified account? We suggest that the meaning of non-anaphoric *svoj* is similar to *different* in terms of Brasoveanu (2011). In the majority of examples, one of the two options is realized. *Svoj* may introduce an entity that is compared to another entity / other entities often available from the previous discourse, as in (21a) (or sometimes it is an entity implied from the same clause as in 21b). Alternatively, *svoj* may be licensed by distributive expressions (as *different* is licensed in a sentence internal context in English).

(21) a. Tvoj plan   prekrasen, no u menya svoj   plan.
            your plan.NOM nice   but at me.GEN svoj.NOM plan.NOM
            'You have a nice plan, but I have a different one.'

        b. No sejchas u inostrancev   svoi   problemy
            but now   at foreigners.GEN svoj.NOM problems.NOM
            'But now foreigners have their own problems (different from the problems of non-foreigners)'

Notably, discussing sentence-internal usage of *different*, Brasoveanu (2011) mentions that some languages do not have such lexical items, so they express similar sentence-internal readings by means of an item like *own*. Russian is cited as one of such languages. We can add that it uses not only the adjective *sobstvennyj* 'own', but also the adjectival *svoj* in such contexts.

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[3]We are aware that this is not a widely accepted view on possessive adjectives in Russian. Here we adhere to a weaker statement to prove that even in that case *svoj* cannot be a possessor.

6   Conclusions

In this paper, we presented a corpus study of the sentences with a nominative *svoj*. Several authors argued that at least some of such sentences may involve biding (Bailyn, 2003; Babyonyshev, 1997; Lavine, 1998; Lavine and Freidin, 2002). However, we found no examples that could be readily analyzed as binding in our corpus samples.

We demonstrated that the most widespread construction with a nominative *svoj* is the external possessor construction with the *u*-PP, and analyzed such sentences in more detail. We observed that the examples from the corpus sample fall into two major groups. In the former, a parallel derivation without *svoj* is grammatical. In the latter, omitting *svoj* is impossible.

The distribution of external possessors is very similar across the two groups; distributive possessors and personal pronouns make up more than two-thirds of all examples. The difference lies in the distribution of copulae in the present affirmative sentences and in the average length of the NP containing *svoj*. If *svoj* can be omitted, the null copula is very infrequent, and the average length of the NP is significantly greater.

We argue that *svoj* does not occupy the position of the possessor in the NP, and that is why it cannot be replaced with possessive pronouns (such as *jego*) in the *u*-possessor constructions. Semantically, *svoj* does not express a relation of possession, but rather characterize the noun as having a unique subset of features. Its meaning is similar to that of the English *different*.

Glossary

ACC = accusative,   DAT = dative,   GEN = genitive,   INS = instrumental,   LOC = locative,   NEG = negative, NOM = nominative, PL = plural, PRS = present.

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