A deontic possibility modal in Latvian: Personal vs. impersonal uses in a corpus

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Abstract. A corpus-based study of a dedicated deontic possibility modal in Latvian focuses on its impersonal variety with a non-canonical subject in the dative. Normally, drīkstēt ‘may’ and other possibility modals have nominative subjects, while dative subjects are found with expressions of necessity. As distinct from other constructions where non-canonical dative subjects are experiencers, the modals are also used with inanimate subjects. A frequent ellipsis of lexical verbs in the impersonal uses of drīkstēt not only reflects the informal style of the construction but also points to the Russian možno / nel’zja as a possible source, especially when combined with an object in the accusative referring to food. The Russian construction has a meaning of deontic possibility, but its use is restricted to animate subjects. The article claims that the animacy restriction was lifted in Latvian under the influence of the necessity modals in contexts of prohibition.

Keywords: Baltic, Latvian, modals, deontic possibility, impersonal, non-canonical subjects

1 Impersonal modal

Drīkstēt, which is a dedicated deontic possibility modal in Latvian, has an impersonal variety that has not so far made its way into the existing descriptions of Latvian modals. This article aims at filling the gap by presenting a study of the construction as it is used in the Latvian Web Corpus (lvTenTen14) of 530 mln words. The main question I am trying to answer is why drīkstēt is the only Latvian modal that has impersonal as well as personal uses.
1.1 On impersonal constructions

Impersonal uses of modals here are understood as those with the experiencer-like subject in the dative rather than nominative, compare (1) and (2). According to Malchukov & Siewierska’s structure-based classification of impersonal constructions (2011, 2), (1) represents the type “with a subject that does not display canonical subject properties”. Another type of impersonal construction, that “with an argumental subject which is not fully referential”, as in (3), will only be mentioned in connection to the former.

(1) Vecākiem nedrīkst būt pārāk konservatīviem.
parent.DAT.PL neg.may.PRS.3 be-INF too conservative.DAT.PL.M
‘Parents should not be too conservative.’

(2) Mazi bērni nedrīkst skatīties televīziju
small.NOM.PL.M child.NOM.PL neg.may.PRS.3 watch.INF television.ACC.SG
ilgāk par divām stundām dienā.
longer than two.DAT.PL.F hour.DAT.PL day.LOC.SG
‘Small children may not watch television longer than two hours a day.’

(3) Nedrīkst palaist šo iespēju garām.
NEG.may.PRS.3 let.INF DEM.ACC.SG opportunity.ACC.SG along
‘One should not miss this opportunity.’

I will return to the problem of dative subjects after a brief introduction into the main means of expressing modality in Latvian.

1.2 On expressing modality in Latvian

Necessity is conveyed by the verb vajadzēt ‘need’ and the verbal category of debitive, see Holvoet (2007; 2001, 9–62) for more detail. Both expressions are roughly synonymous and cover a wider range of meanings including dynamic, deontic and epistemic modality. (4)–(5) are examples1 with the dynamic meaning, but our main interest lies with another feature they all have in common, i.e. the experiencer in the dative.

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1 Examples here and further are taken from lvTenTen14, if not stated otherwise.
A similarly wide range of meanings in the field of possibility is expressed by the verb varēt ‘can’, which, in contrast to the expression of necessity, is a personal construction with a subject in the nominative.

(6) 

(dynamic)

Vai mākslinieks var mainīt sabiedrību?
PTC artist.NOM.SG can.PR.S.3 change.INF society.ACC.SG
[Manuprāt var, ja grib.]
‘Can an artist change the society? [I think s/he can if s/he wants.]’

(7) 

deontic

Vai sievietes var ieņemt rabīna amatu?
PTC woman.NOM.PL can.PR.S.3 occupy.INF rabbi.GEN.SG position.ACC.SG
‘May women be ordained as rabbis?’

(8) 

(epistemic)

Bez noteiktas sistēmas bērns var pamatīgi apjukt.
without definite.GEN.SF system.GEN.SG child.NOM.SG can.PR.S.3 thoroughly get.confused.INF
‘Without a clear system, a child might be utterly confused.’

Alongside varēt ‘can’, there are expressions specialized in deontic possibility (drīkstēt) and what Plungian and van der Auwera (1998) call participant-internal possibility (spēt ‘be able’). Both receive nominative subjects, like varēt.
(9) Vai vecākais bērns drīkst pieskatīt
PTC older.NOM.SG.M.DEF child.NOM.SG may.PRS.3 look.after.INF jaunāko?
younger.ACC.SG.DEF
‘May an older child look after a younger one?’

(10) Cik diennaktis cilvēks spēj izturēt
how.many day.night.ACC.PL human.NOM.SG be.able.PRS.3 endure.INF neguļot?
NEG.sleep.CVB
‘How many nights can a person go without sleep?’

Out of the three possibility verbs only drīkstēt is also found in an impersonal construction with the dative, which is the focus of this article.

(11) No kāda vecuma bērnam drīkst lietot
from what.GEN.SG.M age.GEN.SG child.DAT.SG may.PRS.3 use.INF kontaktlēcas?
contact.lens.ACC.PL
‘At what age may a child start using contact lenses?’

1.3 On dative subjects in Latvian
Apart from displaying non-canonical marking, dative subjects of Latvian modals also lack agentivity. On the whole, it is not uncommon for an experiencer to receive dative marking in Latvian. Apart from the necessity constructions mentioned above, see also examples from Holvoet & Nau (2014, 21), with some of the verbs oscillating between nominative and dative marking of their first arguments in a manner reminiscent of competing patterns found with drīkstēt.

(12) Man sāp.
1SG.DAT hurt.PRS.3
‘I am in pain.’

(13) Viņam vienmēr veicas.
3SG.DAT.M always be.lucky.PRS.3
‘He is always lucky.’
Holvoet (2013; 2015) applies the notion of quasi-subjects to dative experiencers and states that in case of more than one participants, as in (15), subject properties are spread over several NPs. The NP in the dative appears to be the least oblique as it is usually in topic position at the beginning of the clause and animate (Holvoet & Nau 2014, 24–28).

(14)  Man skauž / Es skaužu
  1SG.DAT envy.PRS.3 1SG.NOM envy.PRS.1SG
‘I am envious’

(15)  Man patīk šī grāmata.
  1SG.DAT please.PRS.3 DEM.NOM.SG.F book.NOM.SG
‘I like this book’

However, not all dative subjects are necessarily given the experiencer role by the verb. Modals select an infinitival complement, bringing us to the problem of raising vs. control verbs. Traditionally, epistemic modality is associated with a raising structure, and root modality with a control structure. As Holvoet (2007, 147) points out, in case of the epistemic use of vajadzēt this would involve raising the subject of the embedded clause to the position of dative complement, as in (16)²:

(16)  Tur vajag būt apraktai naudai.
  there need.PRS.3 be.INF buried.DAT.SG.F money.DAT.SG³
‘The money must be buried there.’

An alternative solution suggested by Holvoet is to treat the dative subject as belonging to the infinitival clause because it is not unusual for infinitival embedded clauses to have overt dative subjects in Baltic, as in example (17) from lvTenTen14. A linear position of the dative subject is not indicative of its place in a syntactic structure because of free word order in Latvian.

² See also Holvoet (2007, 149): “Latvian is the only language within Baltic-Slavonic which uses impersonal modals in epistemic meaning. Generally, the stage of epistemic meaning does not seem to be readily accessible to impersonal modals verbs and constructions.”

³ The original glosses are changed to be compatible with the Salos glossing rules.
‘It is dangerous for a president to use such a notion.’

Holvoet suggests that the deontic example (18) might also contain a dative subject in the infinitival clause. His argument is that (18) is synonymous with (19) and in both examples the participant responsible for helping the parents is not the experiencer of the ‘need’.

‘You should help your parents.’

‘It is necessary that you should help your parents.’

Holvoet does not say it explicitly but it can be inferred from his text that the dative subject gradually becomes differentiated from the experiencer as a modal extends its scope from dynamic and deontic to epistemic use, which is a development accompanied by an increase in the degree of grammaticalization. Holvoet (2007, 148–149) gives the corresponding facts as an argument against radical differences in the syntactic structure between deontic and epistemic uses, and views modal verbs as “an area of inter-determinacy between ‘raising’ and ‘control’”.

Separation of the experiencer from the subject of a modal verb corresponds to what Barbiers (1995, 141–150) calls directed and non-directed deontic modality depending on whether the subject of the sentence is also the person who is given permission/assigned an obligation. Non-directed deontic modality is thus grouped together with epistemic modality as both operate on the entire proposition. From the syntactic viewpoint, these considerations provide grounds for treating non-directed modals as raising together with epistemic modals, and directed modals as control verbs together with dynamic modals (de Schepper & Zwarts 2009).
This article does not further investigate the question whether the dative subjects are raised from the embedded clause or not. But the semantic difference between directed and non-directed modality corresponding to a higher degree of grammaticalization is useful when explaining inanimate subjects that cannot be experiencers and are therefore never found with non-modal verbs like *sāpēt* ‘hurt’, etc., as cited above. The examples in (20)–(21) are from Daugavet (2018):

(20) *Gāzei ir jāplūst* <…>
    gas.DAT.SG be.PRS.3 DEB.flow
    ‘Gas must be supplied <…> (literally: Gas must flow)’

(21) *Virtuvei labāk vajadzētu atrasties pa kreisi no*
    kitchen.DAT.SG better need.PRS.3 be.situated.INF.RFL leftwards from
    mājas ieejas <…>
    house.GEN.SG entrance.GEN.SG
    ‘The kitchen should better be situated on the left from the entrance to
    the house <…>’

Inanimate subjects are also found with *drīkstēt*, both in the dative and in the nominative:

(22) *Briļļu lēcām nedrīkst rādīt jums*
    glasses.GEN.PL lense.DAT.PL NEG.may.PRS.3 create.INF 2PL.DAT
    papildus grūtības vai traucēt pildīt visas
    additional difficulty.ACC.PL or hinder.INF perform.INF all.ACC.PL.F
    nepieciešamās funkcijās.
    necessary.ACC.PL.F.DEF function.ACC.PL
    ‘The lenses of your eyeglasses should not cause you any discomfort
    or hinder you from performing any activities.’

(23) *Lences nedrīkst noslīdēt.*
    ribbon NOM.PL NEG.may.PRS.3 slip.away.INF
    ‘The ribbons should not slip away.’

I will look more closely into the differences between dative and nominative subjects in the next sections.
2 Impersonal uses of drīkstēt in the corpus

Examples with the experiencer in the dative are very rare, which explains their absence from literature on Latvian modals. Indeed, out of 99⁴ randomly selected instances of the affirmative drīkstēt from the Corpus only two were found to contain it, and only one such example was found in the sample of 98 instances of the negated nedrīkstēt. The corresponding figures for the experiencer in the nominative are 60 and 44, respectively, which reveals that the impersonal construction is a rather peripheral option.

Additionally, the two samples showed that the present tense (ne)drīkst is a prevailing (about 80%) form both with and without negation, which was a defining factor in shaping other samples.

In order to provide data for the research, sequences of drīkst and nedrīkst preceded by a noun or a pronoun in the dative were extracted from the corpus. After manually selecting those examples where the dative corresponded to the experiencer-like subject of the modal, the following figures were obtained (Table 1). The higher frequencies of datives with the negated nedrīkst are easily explained by the overall higher frequency of nedrīkstēt in comparison to drīkstēt in the Corpus (168 vs. 71 ipm).

|            | drīkst | nedrīkst |
|------------|--------|----------|
| nouns      | 26     | 71       |
| pronouns   | 28     | 64       |

TABLE 1. Nouns and pronouns with (ne)drīkst

In what follows, these samples are compared with four other samples containing (ne)drīkst in combination with a preceding nominative form of a (pro)noun, obtained by a similar procedure from a list of randomly selected sequences.

The data revealed differences between the dative samples and the nominative sample with respect to animacy of (quasi-)subjects and ellipsis; although negation, too, is an important factor.

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⁴ Here and further the initial number of randomly selected corpus examples was 100, but a varying number of examples had to be rejected as incoherent (mostly as a result of machine translation).
2.1 Animacy

All (quasi-)subjects were divided into four groups comprising animate nouns (humans and animals), inanimate nouns (for example, *nosaukums* ‘name’, *māja* ‘house’) and collective nouns (*karaspēks* ‘army’). Because of the small size of the samples, presenting the share of (in)animate nouns as a percentage of all subjects in a sample seemed uninformative. Instead, a ratio between inanimate nouns and animate nouns was chosen for comparison, ignoring the collective nouns altogether.

|       | *drīkst* |       | *nedrīkst* |
|-------|----------|-------|------------|
|       | DAT | NOM | DAT | NOM |        |
| animate | 20  | 53  | 46  | 25  |        |
| inanimate | 1   | 11  | 20  | 45  |        |
| collective | 5   | 23  | 6   | 13  |        |
| sum     | 26  | 87  | 71  | 83  |        |
| inanim/anim | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 1.8 |        |

**TABLE 2.** Animate vs. inanimate nouns with *(ne)drīkst*

The main factor behind the distribution of animate vs. inanimate subjects is negation. In combination with *nedrīkst*, inanimate subjects in the nominative are almost twice as frequent as the animate ones. The usage is typical of instructions and regulations, the most frequent verbs being *būt* ‘be’ and *pārsniegt* ‘exceed’, as in (24). Without negation, the ratio is reversed, with inanimate nominative subjects comprising only 0.2 compared to animate nominative subjects.

(24) *Evakuācijas laiks nedrīkst pārsniegt 30*

*Evacuation time should not exceed 30 minutes.***

The same tendency is maintained by dative subjects, as their ratio to the number of animate subjects is 0.4 with negation and 0.1 without negation. Probably reflecting a less formal character of the source texts, the verb *pārsniegt* is
only found once in the dative sample of *nedrīkst*. The example in (25) might be an informal rendering of an official instruction:\footnote{The use of the dative with an inanimate subject is probably not dissimilar to the substandard use of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} person *viņš, viņa* instead of the demonstrative pronouns *tas, tā* in order to refer to inanimate entities.}

(25) *Maksimālai grīdas temperatūrai nedrīkst*  
maximal.dat.sg.f floor.gen.sg temperature.dat.sg neg.may.prs.3  
pārsniegt 26°C.  
exceed.inf 26°C

*[Tā ir grīdas temperatūra pašās aukstākajās ziemās, parasti grīdas temperatūra ir mazāka.]*  
‘The maximum temperature of the floor should not exceed 26°C.  
[This is the floor temperature on coldest winter days. Normally, the floor temperature is lower.]’

But even with *nedrīkst*, the number of inanimate dative subjects never exceeds the number of animate dative subjects, and one may conclude that the impersonal construction is more preferable. This conclusion would be in full agreement with the fact that the dative is associated with the experiencer semantics, clearly absent from inanimate subjects. Pronouns show the same tendency, although with smaller numbers because of a much higher frequency of animate referents in general.

2.2 Ellipsis

With both dative and nominative subjects the main verb can be omitted, with various degrees of recoverability. Obviously, the verb is easiest to recover if it is present in context, often within the same sentence.

(26) *[Kosmētikas ražošanai pastāv likumi, kas regulē,*]  
ko ražotājs drīkst un ko what.acc manufacturer.nom.sg may.prs.3 and what.acc  
*nedrīkst iekļaut kosmētikas sastāvā.*  
neg.may.prs.3 include.inf cosmetics.gen.sg agent.gen.sg composition.loc.sg

The use of the dative with an inanimate subject is probably not dissimilar to the substandard use of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} person *viņš, viņa* instead of the demonstrative pronouns *tas, tā* in order to refer to inanimate entities.
‘There are laws regulating cosmetics manufacturing that define what <substances> a manufacturer is allowed or not allowed to include into <the formula of> a cosmetic product.’

(27) Kāpēc šajā valstī vieniem drīkst darīt
why DEM.LOC.SG country.LOC.SG some.DAT.PL may.PRS.3 do.INF
visu, bet citiem nedrīkst neko?
all.ACC.SG but other.DAT.PL NEG.may.PRS.3 nothing.ACC
‘Why are some allowed to do everything in this country, but others are not allowed anything?’

The verb doesn’t need to be in the infinitive, especially with the dative:

(28) [Es kā privātīpašnieks arī labprāt nojaukt vecu būdu.]
bet man nedrīkst — vēsturiskā, redzies!
but 1SG.DAT NEG.may.PRS.3 historic.NOM.SG.F.DEF see.PRS.2SG.RFL
‘[As a private owner, I would gladly tear down the old shack] but I’m not allowed to—it’s historic, they say!’

In other cases, the verb can be recovered from its arguments:

(29) [Godātie kolēģi,]
vai es drīkstu ārpus protokola?
PTC 1SG.NOM may.PRS.1SG outside record.GEN.SG
‘[Dear colleagues,] may I <speak> off the record?’

(30) [Nobeiguma punkts ar laivām – Radmanove Mlinice.]
diemžēl tālāk mums nedrīkst,
regrettably further 1PL.DAT NEG.may.PRS.3
[tālāk ir atklātā jūra.]
‘[The final point for the boat is Radmanove Mlinice.] Regrettably, we are not allowed <to go> further. [Further, there is open sea.]’

A combination of (ne)drīkstēt with a noun in the accusative meaning food or other objects of consumption makes up a distinct construction in its own right.
Another case is the accusative of pronouns ko ‘what’ or visu ‘everything’. Sometimes, the omitted verb then is also supposed to mean ‘use/consume’, but very often its meaning can be treated as very general: ‘do’, ‘afford’ with an animate subject and ‘be’, ‘happen’ with an inanimate subject.

The same general meaning can be claimed for those uses of (ne)drīkstēt that lack any arguments.
In the table that follows all dative examples (negated and affirmative as well as those with nouns and pronouns are pooled together), and so are nominative examples.

|                | DAT | NOM |
|----------------|-----|-----|
| verb in context| 16  | 6   |
| acc nouns      | 9   | 0   |
| acc pronouns   | 13  | 5   |
| other arguments| 1   | 1   |
| no arguments   | 21  | 1   |
| all ellipsis examples | 60 | 13 |
| all examples   | 97  | 170 |
| all ellipsis/all examples | 61.9% | 7.6% |

TABLE 3. Ellipsis with (ne)drīkst

The table reveals a tendency which justifies space devoted to ellipsis in this article that almost two thirds of the dative data are those with ellipsis, which is a striking contrast with less than 10% in the nominative data. In other words, when a speaker uses (ne)drīkstēt with the dative, the chances are high that the lexical verb is omitted, and it is only in 16 out of 60 ellipsis examples that the lexical verb is present in context. For the nominative data, the verb is almost always preserved, and when it is not, it is still found in the context in half of the sentences where ellipsis is found. Evidently, these figures reflect a stylistic difference between the dative and the nominative construction, the dative construction being characteristic of informal style.

3 Sources

In its original meaning ‘dare’, still extant, the verb (ne)drīkstēt combines with a nominative subject, see example (35) from Holvoet (2007, 157). Therefore, the use of a dative subject with (ne)drīkstēt must be a new development. The question then is what made this change possible, and why it did not take place with other possibility verbs, that is, the universal varēt and the dynamic spēt.
‘How did you dare pass on letters to Iza without my knowledge?’

There are three possible sources that might have provided the verb (ne)drīkstēt with the dative subject and more than one source is probably involved.

One is a construction consisting of the verb būt ‘be’ and a truncated form of the adverb brīvi ‘freely’ (Holvoet 2007, 46–47). It conveys deontic possibility and, unlike other possibility constructions in Latvian, has the experiencer in the dative. It is similar to the datival variety of (ne)drīkstēt in that both are informal in style, but (ne)būt + brīv has a distinct archaic flavour as it is also used in the language of the Bible. Here is an example from the Corpus:

(36) Saki, vai mums ir brīv keizaram nodevas
tell.imp.2sg ptc 1pl.dat be.prs.3 free emperor.dat.sg tax.acc.pl
dot vai ne?
give.inf or not
‘Tell <us>, should we pay taxes to the emperor, or should we not?’

Another source is a similar Russian construction with a modal predicative možno (in the affirmative) / nel’zja (in the negative), also with the meaning of deontic possibility and the experiencer in the dative. See the translation of (11) into Russian. It is not excluded that the use of the dative subject with (ne)drīkstēt developed under the Russian influence:

(37) S kakogo vozrasta rebēnku možno ispol’zovat’
from what.gen.sg.m age.gen.sg child.dat.sg allowed use.inf
kontaktnye linzy?
contact.adj.acc.pl lense.acc.pl
‘At what age may a child start using contact lenses?’

Finally, the third possibility is that the dative was taken over from the necessity constructions. There are two kinds of contexts where such transfer might
have taken place. Firstly, *nevajadzēt*, as well as the negated version of the debitive, can be synonymous with *nedrīkstēt* in examples like (38)–(40) where they express prohibition.6

(38) *Lietuvas prezidentam nedrīkst pārstāvēt*

*Lithuania.gen president.nom.sg NEG.may.prs.3 represent.inf kādu partiju*  
*some.acc.sg party.acc.sg*  
‘The president of Lithuania may not represent any party.  
[He represents the whole nation.]’

(39) [*Žurnālistikā vispār tiek uzskatīts,*]

*ka žurnālistam nevajag strādāt publisko attiecību jomā.*  
‘In journalism, they believe that a journalist should not work in public relations.’

(40) *Žurnālistam nav jāpārstāv Jebkādas citas intereses,*  
*other.acc.pl.f interest.acc.pl.*  
[izņemot sabiedrības tiesības zināt patiesību par notikumiem, kas tai šķiet nozīmīgi un interesanti.]  
‘A journalist must not represent any other interests apart from the society’s right to know about events that seem important or interesting.’

Secondly, it is not uncommon for prohibition or permission expressed by *(ne)drīkstēt* to be found in coordination with obligation expressed by the necessity constructions:

6 The scope of negation in necessity expressions can include either the modal verb/morpheme or the main verb. Negation on the main verb means that the whole expression conveys prohibition of the action expressed by the main verb. As it is well known, such cases are synonymous with negation having scope over a possibility modal.
(41) *Sacensības dalībniekiem nedrīkst piesārnot competition.Gen.SG participant.DAT.PL NEG.may.PRS.3 pollute.INF
dabu trases teritorijā un ar cienu nature.Acc.SG track.Gen.SG area.LOC.SG and with respect.Acc.SG
jāizturas pret apkārtējo vidi.
DEB.behave towards surrounding.Acc.SG.DEF environment.Acc.SG
‘Competition participants may not pollute the nature around the track and should treat the environment with respect.’

(42) [*Tās rindas, kas dziesmā atkārtojas]*
un ko *drikst un pat vajag visiem kopā* and what.Acc may.PRS.3 and even need.PRS.3 all.DAT.PL together
dziedāt, [sauc par piedziedājumu.] sing.INF
‘Those song lines that are repeated and can and even should be sung together by everybody (literally: those that everybody may and even should sing together), are called a refrain.’

3.1 Animacy restriction
Apart from the meaning of deontic possibility and the dative marking of the subject, arguments for and against each of the sources involve other features associated with *(ne)drikstēt*, namely, animacy of the subject and ellipsis, especially with objects of consumption. With respect to these two, *(ne)būt + brīv* seems to be an unlikely candidate for a direct influence on *(ne)drikstēt.*

Firstly, *(ne)būt + brīv* is almost never used with inanimate subjects in the Corpus. Out of 57 nouns in the subject position, two instances of inanimate subject (4%) represented either metonymy where a vehicle stands for its driver or a poetic metaphor, as in (43). For comparison, the general number of inanimate nouns used as dative subjects with *(ne)drikstēt* is 21 out of 97, or 22%.

(43) [*Un neļausim.*]
lai vienaldzībai tik bieži sirdīs ienākt brīv.
that apaty.DAT.SG so often heart.LOC.PL enter.INF free
‘[And we shall not allow] that apathy is free to enter our hearts so often.’
Secondly, (ne)būt + brīv is possible with the object in the nominative in the absence of the lexical verb in at least several examples in the Corpus, which is in stark contrast to the accusative found with (ne)drīkstēt. Compare the following examples:

(44) *Teicu, ka Tev tas nav brīv!*
    tell.pst.1sg that 2sg.dat dem.nom.sg.m neg.be.prs.3 free
    ‘I told <you> that you are not allowed <to do/have> this!’

(45) *Gaļu negribu, man to nedrīkst.*
    meat.acc.sg neg.want.prs.1sg 1sg.dat dem.acc.sg neg.may.prs.3
    ‘I don’t want meat, I’m not allowed <to eat> it.’

The only example combining (ne)būt +brīv with an object in the accusative seems to be under the influence of (ne)drīkstēt.

(46) *A riekstus nav brīv vakarā*
    PTC nut.acc.pl neg.be.prs.3 free evening.loc.sg
    [— tur OH tomēr.]
    ‘It is not allowed <to eat> nuts in the evening. They still have OH in them.’

Otherwise, all uses of (ne)būt + brīv with ēst ‘eat’ appear to refer to the propriety of the action rather than a healthy diet.

(47) *[Ka viņš gāja Dieva namā un tie ēda skatāmās maizes.]*
    ko neg.be.pst.3 free eat.inf not 3sg.dat. self.dat.sg
    ne viņa biedriem, bet vienīgi priesteriem?
    not 3sg.gen. companion.dat.pl but only priest.dat.pl
    ‘[That he went into the house of God and they ate the consecrated bread] that was not lawful to eat either for him or his companions, but only for the priests?’

The Russian construction seems to be a more likely source for the use of the dative with (ne)drīkstēt exactly because it is commonly used to refer to eating
habits with an omitted verb and the object of consumption in the accusative, as in (48) from the Russian National Corpus (RNC):

(48) Ničego kušat’ nelz’ja: baraška nel’zya, selëdku nel’zya, vodku nel’zya, ničego nel’zya. [Doktor zapretil.]

‘I’m not allowed to eat anything: lamb is not allowed, herring is not allowed, vodka is not allowed, nothing is allowed.

[My doctor prohibited <to eat them>.]’

But, not unlike the Latvian (ne)būt + brīv, the use of the dative with predicatives in Russian is restricted to animate experiencers (Zimmerling 2009). One can suggest therefore that the animacy restriction was lifted after the pattern was adopted into Latvian. Since inanimate subjects are only found with the negated nedrīkstēt, they were probably transferred from synonymous expressions with nevajadzēt and the debitive.

4 Conclusion

The use of the dative (quasi-)subject with the deontic possibility modal drīkstēt is very infrequent, which explains its absence from major works on Latvian modals. Also, the high percentage of ellipsis confirms the informal character of the construction. A frequent use of the construction for referring to consumption habits and the object of consumption in the accusative points to the synonymous Russian construction možno / nel’zja as a likely source. In fact, this might be another reason why the use of the dative with drīkstēt is ignored by researchers.

Nevertheless, the Latvian construction cannot be simply seen as a Latvian calque of the Russian expression. The corpus data shows that animacy restriction, characteristic of the Russian možno / nel’zja, is lifted in Latvian so that the dative (quasi-)subject is used to refer to inanimate participants. The development is indicative of a higher degree of grammaticalization in comparison to either the Russian source or the synonymous Latvian expression būt + brīv, even though the share of inanimate subjects in the dative is still lower than in the mainstream version of drīkstēt involving the nominative subject.
Since inanimate subjects are much more likely to appear with negation, inanimate dative subjects might have been introduced from the expressions of necessity, namely, *vajadzēt* and the debitive. These two constructions are only possible with the dative and, when negated, they are capable of conveying prohibition which is also the meaning of *nedrīkstēt*. Introducing inanimate dative subjects into the *drīkstēt* construction makes the latter susceptible to the issues that remain unresolved for *vajadzēt* and the debitive, that is, whether *drīkstēt* can be interpreted as a raising verb.

**List of Abbreviations**

1—first person, 2—second person, 3—third person, ACC—accusative, ADJ—adjective, ADV—adverb, COMPL—complementizer, CVB—converb, DAT—dative, DEB—deivative, DEF—definite, DEM—demonstrative pronoun, F—feminine, GEN—genitive, INF—ininitiave, LOC—locative, M—masculine, NEG—negation, NOM—nominative, PL—plural, PN—proper name, PRS—present, PTC—particle, RFL—reflexive marker, SBJ—subjunctive, SG—singular

**Data sources**

*lvTenTen* LatvianWeb Corpus. Available at: sketch.engine.eu
*RNC* Russian National Corpus. Available at: ruscorpora.ru

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