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Divergent Paths of Development in Slavic: The Effects of Language Contact on Predicative Possession

Evidence from early Slavic texts supports the existence of three possessive constructions in late Proto-Slavic: the verb *iměti*, a dative possessor and an *u* + genitive construction. In most modern Slavic languages *iměti* expanded and became the primary means for expressing predicative possession, but in Russian *u* + genitive expanded instead. It will be argued that the expansion of *u* + genitive in Russian was promoted by Finnic substratal influence, since Finnic languages use a comparable impersonal possessive construction with the adessive case. It will also be argued that language contact facilitated the expansion of *iměti* in other Slavic languages. In particular, the Czech verb *jmieti* (modern *mít*) was promoted as the basic expression of predicative expression by adstratal influence from neighboring German. German influence on *mít* in Czech is further supported by the grammaticalization of *mít* as the modal 'have to', paralleling German usage, cf. *haben zu*. The dative possessor has not undergone a comparable expansion in modern Slavic languages. Thus contact has contributed to the elimination of some possessive constructions, with the result that most modern Slavic languages now have fewer than the Proto-Slavic three.