

Old Russian Possessive Constructions

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Old Russian Possessive Constructions

A Construction Grammar Approach

by

Hanne Martine Eckhoff

De Gruyter Mouton

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List of abbreviations

ADJ1	adjective type 1, “true” possessive adjective
ADJ2	adjective type 2, “relative” adjective
DAT	dative
ELAB	elaboration (by way of an intrinsic relationship)
ELAB(part)	elaboration (filling the argument slot of a part noun)
ELAB(slot)	elaboration (filling the object-like argument slot of a relational noun)
GEN	genitive
GENMOD	modified genitive-marked noun or genitive-marked nominalised adjective/participle
GENUNMOD	bare genitive noun
ID	identification (by a reference point)
ID(slot)	identification (by a reference point filling an argument slot)
IJ	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-bj-</i>
IN	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-in-</i>
J	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-j-</i>
N	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-n</i>
N'	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-n'</i>
OCS	Old Church Slavonic
OES	Old East Slavic
OV	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-ov-</i>
PTC	particle
REFL	reflexive
SK	adjective derived with the suffix <i>-sk-</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Possession and its neighbours

Possession is a problematic concept. It is used in different ways by different authors, and is simply left undefined in much descriptive work. Nonetheless, “possessive” is a useful general label to put on the constructions analysed in this book, in the sense that all of them have meanings that would be described by most as “possession”. Attempts to define what a “possessive” relationship amounts to range from describing it as a relationship between two nominals determined by context to formulations of the maximally typical features of a possessive constructions, such as the possessive gestalt proposed in Taylor (1996:339–340).

It is typical of many languages to have multiple, apparently hugely overlapping possessive constructions. The distinction between the prenominal s-possessive and the postnominal *of* construction in English is a much-discussed example. Such constructions are interesting in many ways. The language in question may have two or more constructions with apparently very schematic semantics, but nonetheless distinct distributions. What, then, drives the distributional differences? Many possessive constructions have additional functions that are *not* possessive by any reasonable definition, and the different constructions often have different sets of such additional functions. What functions are the “neighbours” of possession, and how are they connected?

This book will try to make sense of the various possessive-like functions and their neighbours by assuming a possessive semantic space and describing this space by way of semantic maps.

2. The case study: Adnominal possession in early Slavic and towards modern Russian

The present exploration of the possessive semantic space is highly empirically driven. This book provides a close case study of constructional polysemy and synonymy in a family of constructions that can all to some extent express relationships commonly accepted as possessive. The test case is the

2 Introduction

encoding of adnominal possession in early Slavic, as attested in Old Church Slavonic (OCS) and Old East Slavic (more specifically, 11th–14th century Old Russian).¹ In both languages, we observe complex interactions between at least five different constructions – genitive, dative and adjective constructions of various kinds.

Another interesting aspect of this group of constructions is that the encoding of adnominal possession is one of the most striking syntactic differences between the earliest attestations of Old Russian and modern Russian. Whereas Old Russian (and OCS) has at least five possessive constructions in a complex pattern of competition and division of labour, the expression of adnominal possession in modern Russian is dominated by the adnominal genitive. In early Slavic, on the other hand, the use of the adnominal genitive to express possession is severely restricted. Thus, the early Slavic constructions also form the point of departure of a fairly well-attested change to the interrelationships between a group of constructions competing in the possessive semantic space. This book therefore also offers a diachronic study of the development of Russian possessive constructions from the earliest attestations and through the 17th century (with a small test sample from the 18th century as well).

Finally, modern Russian possessive constructions have been important in the semantic literature on possession, especially in the many works of Barbara Partee. A better understanding of their history may help to assess proposals about their present-day semantics and syntax, e.g. the claim in Partee and Borschev (2001) that modern Russian prenominal possessors² are modifier-like and adnominal genitives are argument-like.

2.1. Earlier approaches

The origins and history of Slavic adnominal possessives have interested scholars since the earliest days of Slavistics³ and are sketched in most general accounts of East Slavic historical grammar and syntax.⁴ Possessives are also a recurring issue in literature on Common Slavic grammar and syntax and the branching of Slavic,⁵ and on OCS grammar and syntax.⁶ There are also more general works on possession across the Slavic languages and in a typological perspective, which touch upon the earliest attestations (Comrie 1976, Corbett 1987, Ivanov 1989), and on Slavic possession in an Indo-European perspective (Wackernagel 1908, Uryson 1980, Ivanov 1989).

There are a number of specialised works, each focusing on a specific facet of the history of possessive constructions in Russian. Bratishenko (1998, 2003, 2005) deals with the synchronic interrelationship between adjective and genitive constructions in the earliest East Slavic texts. Marojević (1983a, 1983b, 1989) concentrates on possession in a stricter sense in the history of Russian, with emphasis on the origins of the first attested situation. Makarova (1954), Richards (1976) and Widnäs (1958) all present diachronic surveys of the development of possessives in Russian. Zverkovskaja (1986) deals with the formation of Russian derived adjectives diachronically, and Uryson (1980) examines adjective formation and use in a single Old Russian text. Pravdin (1957) examines the possessive dative.

None of these works aim to arrive at a full account of the interactions and history of *every* construction competing in the possessive semantic space. Furthermore, most of them only take possession in a stricter (but unfortunately often undefined) sense into consideration, not the entire set of functions where the possessive constructions compete. In these two respects, this book will hopefully be a contribution to a better understanding of Slavic possessive constructions and their history as well as to the general understanding of adnominal possessives. A review of the existing literature shows that a number of issues are still unresolved.

Several authors (Flier 1974, Huntley 1984, Bratishenko 1998, 2003, 2005) have made it clear that the choice of possessive construction in OCS and Old Russian depends greatly on the properties of the possessor itself, and have set up various hierarchies of referentiality, animacy and specificity to account for this fact. Human and specific possessors to a very great extent favour one of the available adjective constructions (often simply referred to as “possessive adjectives”, ADJ1 in this book; see chapter 3, section 1.1). It has also been argued that this construction is inherently definite (Vaillant 1958:600). However, very little attention has been given to the properties of the possessee, the head noun in the possessive construction, and to the nature of the relationship between possessor and possessee. Only in passing have authors mentioned e.g. that subjects of deverbal nouns are usually realised as adjectives, whereas objects of deverbal nouns tend to be realised as genitives (Bratishenko 1998:153–158; Comrie 1976 makes this a general observation for his comparative study of modern Slavic languages, which is followed up by Corbett 1987:330). A study of early Slavic possessives is therefore likely to benefit from the interest in relational nouns and the exact nature of the possessive relation predominating in the semantic literature on possession.

In the earliest attestations of Slavic, there is a rather clear trend towards complementary distribution between adjective constructions and genitive constructions in at least some of the functions that can be called possessive. In Borkovskij's formulation (1968:165–166), in the overwhelming majority of cases, the possessive genitive is found when the possessor is modified in some way, or is a nominalised adjective or participle, whereas bare genitives are extremely infrequent. Elsewhere, denominal adjectives are used. This is the focus in most general accounts of Russian historical syntax, and much effort has been put into various formulations of the conditions of the distribution. All this attention to complementary distribution is problematic in several ways: Firstly, several authors point out that the complementary distribution “rule” is hardly clear-cut; it is violated both by complex adjective constructions and bare genitive-marked nouns, a fact that is particularly clearly stated in Bratishenko 1998. Secondly, the exploration of the formal conditions on the adjective/genitive distribution has taken attention away from the semantically conditioned interactions between *all* the early Slavic possessive constructions. The interrelationship between the two different adjective constructions (or construction groups) is not well understood, nor are the conditions on where the adnominal genitive is used freely, and where it is not.

There is little agreement on the status of the possessive dative construction, and it tends to be treated separately from the other possessive constructions. It is clearly a Slavic phenomenon, as it is fairly frequent in OCS and normally translates Greek adnominal genitives. However, it is often considered a Balkan phenomenon, as it is more frequent in East Bulgarian texts (Večerka 1963:222; Večerka 1993:198; Xodova 1963:134). In work on Old Russian, some authors state that it was rare (Stecenko 1977:54,101), whereas others say it was fairly frequent (Lomtev 1956:438; Borkovskij 1968:197–198), and it is the opinion of Borkovskij (1949:362) that the possessive dative must have been in little use in the spoken language since it is so rare in Old Russian charters (*gramoty*). Richards (1976) dismisses it as a South Slavicism. Whatever opinions the authors hold, none of them systematically compare the distribution of the dative construction to those of the other constructions in the possessive semantic space, though Pravdin (1957:106–107) holds that in Old Russian, it was never fully synonymous with the possessive⁷ genitive. Comparing the dative construction's semantics and distribution with those of the other possessive constructions would clearly be useful.

There are also several points of disagreement when it comes to the historical development of the Slavic possessive constructions. Firstly, authors

posit very different Common Slavic systems. Some authors use the severe restrictions on the possessive genitive in the earliest attestations as an argument in favour of positing a Common Slavic state where the denominal adjectives dominate almost completely, and where the genitive plays a very small part in expressing possession (Marojević 1989, Uryson 1980), while other authors posit a Common Slavic state that is very similar to the one attested in OCS (Richards 1976). Secondly, comparisons of the OCS and Old Russian systems are at best impressionistic, and the conclusions differ substantially. For instance, Richards (1976) claims that OCS had a cleaner complementary distribution between genitive and adjective constructions, whereas Bratishenko (1998:91) claims the opposite. Most authors state that the dative construction was more frequent and more freely used in OCS than in Old Russian, but it is not clear that this is the case. Thirdly, authors do not agree on the dating of the various changes in the distribution of possessive constructions in the history of Russian. Therefore, this book will use one OCS text sample and four text samples from Old and Middle Russian in order to contribute to a clearer understanding of why, when and how the genitive came to take over many of the functions of the denominal adjectives and all of the functions of the possessive dative.⁸

2.2. The text samples

As all work in historical linguistics must be, this is a corpus study. At the time when the data work for this book was done, there were no proper electronic corpora of early Slavic texts (a situation which is now rapidly improving). The examples have thus all been hand-excerpted, and the text samples read in full, something which may have lead to some errors and omissions.

In order to be able to compare OCS and the earliest attested Old Russian, and to do a diachronic survey of the development in Russian, I compiled five text samples: One of OCS texts, one of 11th–14th century Old Russian texts, and three samples of later Russian; one from the 15th century, one from the 16th century and one from the 17th century. The samples are sized in accordance with the number of years they span, and selected so as to give a balanced representation by geography and literary genre. The dating of the texts is by year of composition, not by the date of the manuscript (which may be several centuries later), but wherever there was a choice, preference was given to the edition based on the earliest manuscript. From each text

every construction involving an adnominal genitive, an adnominal dative or a denominal adjective was excerpted, with the following restrictions:

- Only constructions with an overt head were excerpted
- Constructions headed by numerals or quantifier nouns (such as “multitude”) were excluded (since dependent nouns in such constructions are consistently genitive-marked)
- Constructions with bare genitive- or dative-marked pronoun dependents were excluded
- The selection of denominal adjectives was limited as described in chapter 3, section 1.1 and 1.2
- Clearly qualitative adjectives were excluded

The excerpts were first registered in a FileMaker database, and the data were then exported into and further processed in the statistics software package R. For a fuller description of the selection criteria and method of excerption, and a full list of the text samples, see the Appendix.

3. Why construction grammar?

This book belongs to the usage-based variety of the construction grammar tradition in the sense that it subscribes to the notions shared by work by Ronald Langacker (1987, 1991), Adele Goldberg (1995, 2006) and William Croft (2001). As Goldberg (2006:chapter 10) points out, all flavours of construction grammar, and also Langacker’s mostly compatible Cognitive Grammar, take the view that a uniform type of description is possible for all linguistic units: Anything from a dependent morphological element or lexical item to a complex and abstract syntactic pattern may be described as a symbolic unit or a construction, a pairing of form and meaning. The constructions under scrutiny will not be described by way of any particular formalism. This choice is not a matter of principle; rather, the form–meaning split is used to concentrate on the semantics of the constructions, whereas the form side has not been worked out in detail.

One of the most important implications of this view for the present book is the notion that even a relatively abstract syntactic pattern, a complex and (partially) schematic construction, has a semantic side to it, which may well be more schematic than that of a lexical item, but which in principle is of the

same kind. An important consequence is that complex and schematic constructions may be – and often are – polysemous, and that such constructions may be in relationships of partial synonymy with other constructions. The meanings associated with a single construction, and the meanings shared by a group of formally unrelated, but partially synonymous constructions, can be seen as clusters in semantic space, and each construction's distribution may be plotted onto a semantic map of such a cluster of meanings (see section 4).

Constructions are organised in inheritance networks, and range from highly schematic (such as the Subject–Predicate construction, which is a schematic pattern from which all constructions with a subject and a predicate inherit) to highly lexically specific in the case of idiomatic expressions, such as *spill the beans*. This construction has a subject slot (and thus inherits from the Subject–Predicate construction), and the verb may be inflected, but otherwise it is quite inflexible. Constructions are also connected by semantic extension links and links that generalise over parts of different constructions. This book subscribes to the usage-based variety of this model, where the storage and prominence of a construction is deemed to depend on its actual use and frequency. Schematicity relations, semantic extensions and the results of usage frequencies will have a place in the analysis of the diachronic development of the Old Russian possessive constructions. Such an analysis is akin to the diachronic work on syntactic productivity by Barðdal (2008).

Finally, construction grammar allows a careful analysis of the respective contributions of a construction schema and of its component parts. Possessive constructions are expected to have quite schematic meanings. Particularly the head noun, but also the possessor nominal, is expected to contribute considerably to the meaning of each instance of the construction. It could be argued that the meaning ascribed to the possessive construction as a whole might as easily be ascribed to the possessive morpheme in question (be it a case ending or an adjective suffix). Case endings and derivational suffixes are inextricably linked to the nouns to which they are attached, and a noun–suffix combination would also count as a construction on the present approach. Furthermore, at least the case endings have meanings that are highly conditioned by the type of element heading the case-marked noun. The meanings of the genitive, in particular, differ considerably depending on whether the genitive-marked noun is headed by a noun, a verb or a preposition, and it is not obvious that it is possible to give a coherent synchronic analysis of the meanings of a single suffix (or noun-suffix combination) across all head types, cf. the attempts in Berg-Olsen (2005), Toft (2010). The requirement that the head be a noun, as

well as the decision to look at the meaning of the construction as a whole, thus both seem justified.

4. Semantic maps

Semantic maps are widely used in linguistics. They are most widespread in typology (e.g. Haspelmath 1997, 2003), but have also been put to use in smaller-scale comparisons between languages (Clancy 2006), and likewise in single-language diachronic studies – in comparisons between stages of one and the same language (Luraghi 2003). For a quantitative application of Barðdal's work on syntactic productivity (2008), also involving semantic maps and cluster modelling, see Fedriani (forthc.)

The rationale for using semantic maps in this book is twofold:

Firstly, it has long been recognised that the semantics of possession is intricate, and that languages typically have multiple adnominal possessive constructions with substantial overlaps (e.g. Partee and Borschev 2001). The early Slavic situation is quite an extreme case, as there can be argued to be five or more overlapping constructions expressing this type of content. Semantic maps (based on cross-linguistic observations) are useful tools for single-language comparisons in such cases of rampant synonymy.

Secondly, this is also a diachronic study. The book traces the development of possessive constructions from OCS, the earliest attestation of Slavic, up to 17th–18th century Russian, which is close to the present-day variety. During this period of time, the system of expressing adnominal possession changes substantially, but the changes take the form of slow and gradual semantic shifts – semantic extensions and retractions that can best be visualised on a map.

Both for the synchronic analysis of complex interactions between partly synonymous constructions and for the analysis of the diachronic shifts, it makes sense to view the possessive constructions as form–meaning pairings interacting in a semantic space which is kept constant over time. Even though the semantics of each individual construction changes, the expectation is that each construction will have a semantic centre of gravity and a connected set of functions around this centre, and that their semantics will either expand or retract along connected paths in the semantic space (cf. Croft 2001:92–96).

5. A path through the book

Chapter 2 discusses the existing literature on possession and relational nouns, and establishes a set of functional nodes for a map of the possessive semantic space based on a cross-classification of noun types and constructional meaning, using the analytic tools of Langacker (2000) and Taylor (1996) as a point of departure. A semantic map is then generated by way of a correspondence analysis of the data.

Chapter 3 establishes the five main possessive construction types in the 11th–14th century Old Russian text sample and plots each of them on the map of the possessive semantic space. Although all constructions overlap to a smaller or greater extent, each construction is found to have a clear semantic centre of gravity.

Chapters 4–6 each zooms in on natural groups of nodes on the map of the possessive semantic space and provides close studies of the distributions of constructions at each node in the OCS and 11th–14th century Old Russian text samples, exploring which forms can express which of the posited meanings, and under which circumstances? Each chapter also gives a diachronic overview of the development at each node up to the 17th century.

Chapter 7 gathers the synchronic and diachronic findings from the preceding three chapters and evaluates the semantic map as a tool. The findings are used to establish tentative implicational connections between the map nodes.

Chapter 8 gives some concluding remarks.

Chapter 2

A map of the possessive semantic space

The main theoretical tool of this book will be a semantic map of the possessive semantic space. Adnominal possession has been included in semantic maps by previous authors, e.g. the map of non-spatial case functions in Malchukov and Narrog (2009), where possessives are connected to agents, sources and benefactives. Likewise, the map of typical dative functions found in Haspelmath (2003) clearly shows how possessive datives might be connected to the greater dative semantic space. However, such maps have to my knowledge not been used to study the finer distinctions between the various subtypes of possession and how possessive constructions may compete and interact within a more fine-grained space.⁹ The first question we need to address is what functional nodes we need for such a map.

The semantic literature on adnominal possession has focused on several aspects of the phenomenon, in particular on the contribution of the head noun's semantics to the interpretation of the construction as a whole, and also on the possibility of positing independent constructional meanings for possessive constructions. This chapter addresses both issues: First, there is a discussion of the importance of relational nouns to the understanding of adnominal possessives. Second, as a viable proposal for constructional meanings in the possessive semantic space, the Cognitive Grammar analyses of English possessive constructions proposed in Langacker (2000) and Taylor (1996) are discussed. I shall argue that the nodes of a map of the possessive semantic map should be based on a cross-classification of the properties of the head noun and the main constructional meanings suggested in the Cognitive Grammar analysis. In the final subsection of the chapter I present such a configured map based on a correspondence analysis of the data sorted into the seven categories resulting from the cross-classification.

1. Where does the meaning come from?

Constructions that can express adnominal possession in a wide sense are expected to have quite schematic meanings. This makes their component parts important. In particular, the head nouns of the constructions are expected to