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PREDICATIVE POSSESSION IN UKRAINIAN AND INTRA-SLAVONIC LANGUAGE CONTACT[1]

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Abstract

Ukrainian has two inherited syntactic forms for possessive *have*: a transitive one with a lexical *have*-verb, and an intransitive, originally locative *be*-construction. On the basis of four corpus studies, the article establishes their relative frequency in Middle Ukrainian writing (17th and 18th c.), Modern Ukrainian dialects (20th c.), and contemporary Standard Ukrainian (post-2000). The aim is to investigate whether contact with neighbouring Slavonic languages – Polish, Russian, and Belarusian – may have had an influence on the frequencies observed. The areal- and historical-sociolinguistic context and evidence of other contact-induced features provide arguments that Polish influence enhanced or sustained the frequency of the *have*-possessive in Middle Ukrainian writing and 20th-c. South-Western Ukrainian, and Russian influence the frequency of the *be*-possessive in 20th-c. South-Eastern and Northern Ukrainian, with possible transitional Belarusian features in the latter too. The contact-induced frequency effects do not involve borrowing or calquing; nor do they necessarily run counter to language-internal developments. It is argued that they still constitute a key mechanism in language contact, especially between closely related languages. For contemporary, post-2000 written Standard Ukrainian, the study finds a stable, pan-Ukrainian prevalence of the *have*- over the *be*-possessive. The underlying distributional regularities are contact-independent but require further examination.

Анотація

В українській мові є дві успадковані конструкції для вираження предикативної посесивності: перехідна конструкція з дієсловом «мати» та неперехідна, етимологічно локативна конструкція з дієсловом «бути». У статті встановлено їхню відносну частоту у чотирьох вибраних корпусах: у середньоукраїнській писемності XVII та XVIII століть, у сучасних українських діалектах XX століття та у сучасній літературній українській мові після 2000 року. Головна мета статті — дослідити, чи контакт із сусідніми слов'янськими мовами (польською, російською та білоруською) міг вплинути на частоти виявлених конструкцій. Ареальний та історико-соціолінгвістичний контекст разом з іншими лінгвістичними особливостями, зумовленими мовними контактами, призводять до наступних висновків: вплив польської мови посилював або підтримував

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частоту перехідної конструкції з дієсловом «мати» у середньоукраїнській писемності та південно-західних діалектах. Вплив російської мови та, можливо, білоруських діалектів посилював або підтримував частоту неперехідної конструкції з дієсловом «бути» у північноукраїнських та південно-східних діалектах. Ці частотні ефекти, зумовлені мовними контактами, не були результатом запозичення чи калькування. Вони також не обов'язково суперечили внутрішньомовному розвитку української мови. У статті стверджується, що такі частотні ефекти, тим не менш, є важливим механізмом мовного контакту, зокрема між близькоспорідненими мовами. Що стосується сучасної писемної літературної мови, корпусне дослідження виявляє стабільну, загальноукраїнську перевагу перехідної конструкції з дієсловом «мати» над неперехідною конструкцією з дієсловом «бути». Закономірності, що лежать в основі розподілу двох конструкцій, не залежать від будь-якого мовного контакту, а вимагають подальшого вивчення.

[Ukrainian]

1. Introduction

The article is a case study in syntactic microvariation as a result of language contact. It deals with two alternative expressions for predicative possession in select varieties of Ukrainian from the 17th to the 21st c. One is a syntactically transitive *have*-possessive, the other one a syntactically intransitive, locative *be*-possessive. The study focuses on their relative frequency in varieties of written and spoken Ukrainian of the Middle Ukrainian period (15th – late 18th c.) and the Modern Ukrainian period (since the late 18th c.) (for the periodisation of the history of Ukrainian, see, for example, Nimčuk 1997: 11–12; Shevelov 1979: 40). The aim is to investigate to what extent language contact with neighbouring Polish, Russian, and Belarusian may have been a factor contributing to the frequencies observed.

In the existing scholarship, it has often been claimed, in passing, that intra-Slavonic language contact played a role in the evolution of the distinct Ukrainian dual system of expressing predicative possession. The transitive *have*-possessive is said to be characteristic of South-Western Ukrainian usage, partly due to Polish literary traditions and vernacular influence. In South-Eastern Ukrainian usage, it is assumed that Modern Standard Russian may have contributed to the dominance of the intransitive locative *be*-possessive (see, for example, Danylenko 2002: 121; Grković-Major 2011: 52–3; Isačenko 1974: 73; McAnallen 2011a: 3, 105). However, these assumptions have never been submitted to more detailed scrutiny. This is the main purpose of the present study. Thus, its overall objective is to examine the role that intra-Slavonic language contact may have played in the expression of predicative possession in select forms of written and spoken Ukrainian since the 17th c.

To that end, data from four Ukrainian corpora will be considered: (i) a corpus of chronicles and administrative texts of the 17th and early 18th century representing the so-called *prostaja mova*, often referred to as 'Ruthenian' in English writing on the topic; (ii) a corpus of dramatic interludes of the 17th and, in particular, first half of the 18th century, most of them written in a variety that Danylenko (2008a: 64, 66; Danylenko 2008b: 101) characterises as a more liberally vernacularised 'continuation of the *prostaia mova* of the 17th century', yielding 'a new, northern Ukrainian variety, based on supradialectal features (. . .) with an admixture of (. . .) elements bequeathed by tradition'; (iii) a corpus of transcribed South-Western, South-Eastern and Northern Ukrainian dialectal texts collected in the 1990s to early 2000s and in the 1960s with speakers mostly born before WWII, that is to say the then older and oldest generations of dialect speakers; and (iv) large-scale contemporary post-independence written Standard Ukrainian corpus data of the 2000s from the *General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian* (*GRAC*).

The reason for selecting these four corpora is that they represent two key written varieties in the history of Ukrainian – namely, the late *prostaja mova* of the 17th – 18th c. and contemporary Standard Ukrainian – as well as of a vernacular-oriented and vernacular varieties proper – namely, 18th-c. interludes and 20th-c. dialects. Thus, they facilitate four case studies that allow us to draw an empirically verified conclusion of whether language contact has been a recurrent contributing factor, or not, in shaping the expression of predicative possession in the Middle and Modern Ukrainian periods.

One could certainly include further corpora providing more data points for the study of predicative possession in varieties of Ukrainian of the middle and modern periods, such as 18th-century texts other than interludes whose language is more liberally vernacularised too, early dialectal compilations of the 19th and early 20th c. and present-day dialectal materials with younger speakers. It must be stressed that, at present, there are important practical constraints for doing so. There is no lemmatised, morpho-syntactically annotated and parsed digital corpus of Middle Ukrainian with metatextual markup. Nor are there as yet any such existing resources for Ukrainian dialects, which would allow for quantitative variationist analyses of linguistic variables, such as competing expressions of predicative possession.[2] Thus, the above-mentioned corpora (i)–(iii) have been specifically assembled for the present study and must rely on basic digital materials and tools that make it possible to investigate the relative frequency of the transitive *have*- vs. intransitive locative *be*-possessive. The situation is very different as far as corpus (iv) is concerned. The *General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian* (*GRAC*) is a large annotated and searchable corpus which mainly captures written Modern Standard Ukrainian and allows for large-scale analyses of linguistic variables.

For the four corpora that are included in this study, the point of departure of the analysis will be the linguistic form of the *have*- vs. the *be*-possessive, rather than the notions of possession such as temporary vs. permanent or alienable vs. inalienable which they may express (see Heine 1997: 34–41; Stassen 2009: 15–25). That is, the focus is on establishing the relative frequency of the transitive *have*- vs. intransitive locative *be*-possessive in the four corpora considered. The only potentially correlating factors that will be taken into account in the quantifications are the animacy vs. inanimacy of the possessor and the concreteness vs. abstractness of the possessee; for two reasons: Unlike other factors, these are less prone to ambiguities. More importantly, in the context of the present study these are factors that are routinely called upon to elucidate the evolution and distribution of the transitive *have*- vs. intransitive locative *be*-possessive in Standard Russian and Belarusian (see Mazzitelli 2015: 168–71 for Belarusian, and for a recent survey of the considerable literature on the topic for Russian). They may, therefore, be relevant to establishing whether Russian and Belarusian played a role in the observed profile of the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive variation in Ukrainian. The main argument of the paper goes as follows: It is plausible to consider language contact a factor influencing the expression of predicative possession if two sets of facts apply: First, one of the two variants shows a very high proportion over the other in a given corpus. Second, the relevant areal- and sociolinguistic context has given rise to language-contact phenomena in the types of text gathered in the corpus in other respects too. If language contact does emerge as a plausible factor, it will not be an instance of borrowing or calquing because both expressions of predicative possession are inherited in Ukrainian. Rather, it needs to be analysed as what Mougeon, Nadasdi & Rehner (Mougeon et al. 2005: 102–3) call a 'covert inter-systemic transfer'. This is a quantitative development only, whereby a feature in the target language that is similar to one in the source language shows an 'increase in (...) frequency (...) at the expense of an alternative feature' due to source-language influence. This

[2] For a survey of current ongoing work on the creation of Ukrainian corpora, see https://k-centre.uacorpus.org/ (last consulted 15 July, 2025).

is akin to what Heine & Kuteva (2005: 44–62) discuss as a contact-induced frequency rise in the use of an existing, native use pattern. They do so in the specific context of grammaticalisation. Yet, as mentioned, Ukrainian inherited both, the transitive *have*-possessive and the intransitive locative *be*-possessive as fully grammaticalised expressions. This is why a purely quantitative notion is preferable in the context of this study. The short-cut term employed will be 'contact-induced frequency effect' as it is more immediately transparent than 'covert inter-systemic transfer'.[3] One can hypothesise more generally that it represents an important form of contact-induced language change between closely related languages. Intra-Slavonic contact may readily increase the frequency of a feature in a target variety under the influence of a similar or identical feature in a source variety. This may, but need not, affect the functional or grammatical properties of the given feature. In both cases – as in language-contact studies in general, a key challenge is to provide evidence that no other, language-internal explanation of the observable frequency pattern is preferable. Despite this challenge, I maintain that the possibility of language contact affecting the frequency of an existing native construction must be taken into account, in particular in contact situations involving closely related languages.

To pursue the above-outlined argument, the paper will proceed as follows: Section 2 introduces the two variants at hand: the transitive have-*possessive* and the intransitive locative *be*-possessive, and it juxtaposes the Modern Standard Ukrainian facts with those in Polish, Russian, and Belarusian. The subsequent four sections will deal with the four corpora studied for this paper. There will be further detail on their composition and relevance. Each section introduces the results of the frequency counts for *have*- vs. *be*-possessive; in (i) the selected late *prostaja-mova* texts (Section 3), (ii) the late 17th- and 18th-c. dramatic interludes (Section 4), (iii) the 20th-c. dialect data (Section 5), and (iv) the post-2000 evidence from the *General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian* (Section 6). Each section then submits the results of the corpus study to the main question under investigation; namely, whether the observed frequencies, in conjunction with the relevant areal- and sociolinguistic context, provide evidence that the expression of predicate possession may have been subject to language-contact influence in the types of text gathered in the respective corpus. Section 7 surveys the results of the corpus studies and considers whether they allow us to draw conclusions about the diachronic development in the expression of predicative possession in written and spoken varieties of Ukrainian of the middle and modern periods.

2. Ukrainian *have*- and *be*-possessive in their Slavonic context

Ukrainian and East Slavonic at large inherited both expressions of predicative possession from the Common Slavonic ancestor language (see, for example, Danylenko 2002; Grković-Major 2011; McAnallen 2011b: 155–57; for 14th – 15th c. Ukrainian attestations see Humeck'ka 1977: 138, 438–39; see also Slyn'ko 1973: 96–7). From a synchronic point of view, Isačenko (1974: 44) posited a typological distinction that 'polarize[s] modern European languages into *have*-languages (…) and *be*-languages'. To encode predicative possession, *be*-languages use an intransitive locative construction *at X is Y*, while *have*-languages employ a transitive construction *X has Y*. From a wider typological perspective, there are further ways of encoding possession predicatively. Heine (1997) proposes a cognitive-semantic taxonomy. Stassen (2009), on the other hand, uses formal criteria only and arrives at four basic types of predicative possession, including locative and transitive. The latter two are the ones that we find in Ukrainian.

[3] McAnallen (2011a: 6) notes, with further references, that 'frequency changes as a result of contact has been discussed elsewhere in literature on language contact, but a consensus on terminology has yet to be reached.'

To recapitulate their well-known profile (see Weiss 2020 for Slavonic in general), examples (1)–(3) illustrate the basic structures in Modern Standard Ukrainian:

(1) U brata je /bula /bude dytyna.
at brother.GEN.SG be.PRS.3SG /be.PST.F.SG /be.FUT.3SG child.NOM.F.SG
'(My) brother has/had/will have a child.'

(2) Brat maje dytynu.
brother.NOM.SG have.PRS.3SG child.ACC.SG
'(My) brother has a child.'

(3) Brat ne maje dytyny.
brother.NOM.SG NEG have.PRS.3SG child.GEN.SG
'(My) brother does not have a child.'

The *have*-possessive in (2) is a canonical transitive structure. The verb *maty* 'have' takes a possessor argument as the nominative-case marked subject and a possessee argument as the accusative-case marked direct object. When negated, the direct object typically receives genitive of negation in Ukrainian (3).[4] There are no selectional restrictions on the possessor and possessee.

The *be*-possessive is an intransitive structure. The possessor is animate, usually human, even though inanimate possessors are not ungrammatical in principle.[5] The possessor is encoded as a locative prepositional phrase. The possessee is the nominative-case marked subject of the *buty*-'be'-predication. The verb agrees with it in person and number (in the present tense and future) or gender and number (in the past tense), as shown in (1). Unlike the transitive variant, the locative one shows some formal idiosyncrasies. The paradigm of the *be*-possessive is defective and partly suppletive. It has no non-finite forms and, thus, cannot be used in a syntactic context with a gerund or an infinitive, as in *He wants to have the book*. In the present tense, the 3Sg form *je* 'is' may also be used with a plural subject, or it may be omitted altogether; otherwise put, replaced with a zero-form. Finally, when negated, the *be*-possessive turns into an impersonal construction; that is, into one that lacks a nominative-case marked subject. In the present tense, it employs the suppletive predicate *nema(je)* 'there is no' which, etymologically, is derived from 3SG *maty* 'have', as opposed to 3SG neutral forms of *buty* 'be' in the past and future. The possessee argument is genitive-case marked, as illustrated in (4):

(4) U brata ne-ma(je) /ne bulo /ne bude dytyny.
at brother.GEN.SG NEG-is /NEG be.PST.N.SG /NEG be.FUT.3SG child.GEN.SG
'(My) brother doesn't/didn't/won't have a child.'

Next to these formal idiosyncrasies, there is also an important semantic one. Since the *be*-possessive is a derived locative construction, it may as well express just this, namely the presence of an entity in, or its absence from a particular place. As is well known from typological work, locative, possessive as well as existential constructions are often closely related or identical in language (see, for example, Clarke 1978; Lyons 1967). In Ukrainian too, the affirmative and negated structures in (1) and (4) may be locative, rather than possessive, as illustrated in (5):

[4] The genitive of negation is a syntactic structure inherited from the Common Slavonic ancestor language (see, for example, Kuryłowicz 1987).

[5] It is often claimed with reference to Russian that the *be*-possessive is not available with inanimate possessors (see Isačenko 1974: 59). However, this is too strong a generalisation (for some relevant counterexamples, see Clancy 2010: 143–4).

(5) Dytyna je u brata.
child.NOM.SG be.PRS.3SG at brother.GEN.SG
'The child is at my brother's.'

As (5) indicates, and as Isačenko (1974: 46) has observed for Russian, the non-possessive reading tends to be borne out when the noun phrase, rather than the prepositional phrase is topicalised. However, this need not always be the case. Nor are there any other overt formal means that express the distinction. Thus, contextual cues may be insufficient to disambiguate a sentence as expressing location or possession.[6] Their possible underlying semantic and syntactic structures have been discussed widely (see Jung 2011: 37–73), starting with Chvany (1975) on Russian *byt'* 'be' as far as Slavonic is concerned (see Tsedryk 2020 for a recent discussion of Belarusian). The present paper will return to some aspects of this discussion in Section 6.

For the sake of completeness, it must be mentioned that Ukrainian inherited a third expression of predicative possession from Common Slavonic: the 'existential construction with 'be' + dative' in Weiss' (2020) terms (see also Grković-Major 2011; McAnallen 2011a: 3–4, 21–3, 27–9, 56–9). There are vestiges of it in dialectal Ukrainian, such as the Central Dnieper dialect example (6), but also in Modern Standard Ukrainian as in (7).

(6) Myni nijakoji pomoči ni-ma.
I.DAT no.GEN.SG help.GEN.SG NEG-is
'There is no help for me at all.'
≈ 'I don't have any help at all.'
(Martynova 2012: 27)

(7) Baryš že ves' meni i tvij.
profit.NOM.M.SG FOC all.NOM.M.SG I.DAT and your.NOM.M.SG
'The profit will go to you and me.'
≈ 'I shall have the profit, and it is yours too.' (Shevelov 1963: 183)

However, this shades into expressions of interest or belonging and is not a productive pattern any longer to encode possession predicatively on a par with (1) and (2). It does, therefore, not form part of the present study.

The above-mentioned facts pertaining to the Modern Standard Ukrainian *have*- and *be*-possessives partly overlap and partly contrast with those in the two main neighbouring Slavonic standard languages, Polish to the west and Russian to the north and east. As mentioned, both the locative *be*-structure and transitive *have* may be traced back to Common Slavonic, even if their distribution and frequency in the ancestor language remain a matter of dispute. Russian, in contrast to Ukrainian, came to give preference to the *be*-possessive, while the use of transitive *imet'* 'have' has become increasingly constrained in the history of Russian (see Safarewiczowa 1964). It now typically occurs with some inanimate possessors, certain

[6] There is the unambiguously non-possessive, locative construction in (i) with a locative-case marked prepositional phrase.

(i) Dytyna je v Odesi.
child.NOM.SG be.PRS.3SG in Odesa.LOC.SG
'The child is in Odesa.'

Equally, there are unambiguously non-possessive existential sentences, such as (ii)–(iii), which lack a prepositional phrase altogether.

(ii) Je dytyna.
be.PRS.3SG child.NOM.SG
'There is a child.'

(iii) Ne-ma(je) dytyny.
NEG-is child.GEN.SG
'There is no child.'

types of abstract possessee, and in set phrases. Style- and genre-specific usage is clearly highly relevant too, but this does not mean that written forms of Standard Russian are fundamentally different from colloquial Russian in their preference for the *be*-possessive (see Clancy 2010: 144–54; Isačenko 1974: 54, 58–60; McAnallen 2011a: 77; Popov 1974). Polish, on the other hand, has generalised transitive *mieć* 'have' for predicative possession, with only very occasional instances of the *be*-possessive in the standard language.[7] For Standard Belarusian, Mazzitelli (2015) offered a detailed account of predicative possession (both, in '*Narkamaŭka*' and *Taraškevica*), which attests to the variance of *have*- vs. *be*-possessive in this East Slavonic language too. There are similar factors favouring the use of the transitive variant *mec*' 'have' as in Russian: with inanimate possessors, abstract possessees, and in certain set phrases. However, in contrast to Russian, Belarusian *mec*' 'have' is not subject to stylistic or genre-specific constraints (see Mazzitelli 2015: 92–102, 111–7, 165–70).

This general 'west-to-east' picture in terms of standard languages appears to place Ukrainian, together with Belarusian, into a transitional area between the predominant *have*-pattern of Polish and the qualified *be*-pattern of Russian.[8] Ever since Isačenko (1974: 44), the term 'transitional' has been routinely called upon to describe Ukrainian in the treatment of predicative possession across Slavonic, including the latest survey by Weiss (2020). It should be added that Isačenko (1974: 65–74) also drew on further lexical and morpho-syntactic differences to argue for a typology that distinguishes Slavonic and other European *have*-patterning languages from *be*-patterning ones (see also Jung 2011: 21–4). His list includes, for example, the functioning of transitive *have* as a (quasi-) auxiliary vs. functionally similar or equivalent *be*-predications to form different periphrastic past tenses, or to express deontic modality.[9] However, the purported 'transitionality' of Ukrainian within this typology is a rather cursory generalisation based on a broad view of Modern Standard Ukrainian only. The following sections shall provide a more detailed exploration of the possessive *have*- vs. *be*-patterning in the four select corpora of the Middle and Modern Ukrainian periods introduced in Section 1, with a particular focus on possible language-contact induced frequency effects on the variation under investigation.

[7] Take, for example, the following description of the interior of a flat, which allows for a possessive reading (next to an existential one):

(i) Ale **u mnie jest** zasłona. Mam tapczan (...)
but at I.GEN be.PRS.3SG curtain.NOM.SG have.PRS.1SG sofa.bed.ACC.SG (...)
'But I have a curtain. I have a sofa bed (...)'
('But there is a curtain at mine. I have a sofa bed ...') (*Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego*: https://nkjp.pl/; 15 July, 2025)

[8] In fact, Isačenko (1974: 44) himself appears to consider Polish 'transitional' too, but he does not elaborate on this.

[9] Ukrainian again has both, as illustrated in (i) and (ii), with a zero copula in (ii):

(i) Ščo majemo robyty?
what have.PRS.1PL do.INF
'What should we do?'

(ii) Tut tobi stojaty.
here you.DAT stand.INF
'You should stand here.' (Shevelov 1963: 134)

3. Middle Ukrainian evidence: Chronicles and court records

The term Middle Ukrainian denotes a period in the history of the language conventionally dated from the 15th to the late 18th c. In 1569, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered into a real union. As a result, most parts of Ukraine became part of the Kingdom until the Xmel'nyc'kyj Uprising of 1648 and the creation of the Cossack Hetmanate in large parts of central Ukraine to the east and west of the Dnipro. The following Russo-Polish War (1654–1667) left Right-Bank Ukraine under the Polish crown. Left-Bank Ukraine became a vassal of the Tsardom of Muscovy until its full incorporation into Russia later in the 18th c., following a failed attempt to regain independence under Hetman Ivan Mazepa in 1709.

As far as the language situation is concerned, the incorporation of most of Ukraine into Poland in 1569 led to the spread of Polish into various domains, in particular administration and education. Polish effectively joined Church Slavonic and the *prostaja mova* ('Ruthenian') as Ukraine's third written language (for the linguistic situation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at large, see, for example, Bednarczuk 2013; Dini 2014: 374–91; Temčinas 2017; Wiemer 2003). The *prostaja mova* ('Ruthenian') has been subject to long-standing investigations into an appropriate periodisation and nomenclature as well as into its linguistic make-up in general (see, for example, Bunčić 2015; Danylenko 2006; Moser 2002 for recent surveys) and in individual authors (see, for example, Pugh 1996). In Ukrainian scholarship, it is traditionally altogether discussed in the context of the notion of a *staroukrajins'ka literaturna mova* 'Old Ukrainian literary language' (see Rusanivs'kyj 2001: 43–125). In the present context, the term refers to the written language of the 16th and 17th c. that had developed from the traditional, vernacular-related variety used in secular writing among the East Slavonic speakers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The phonology and morphology were based on certain supra-dialectal features shared by Belarusian and Ukrainian, as far as orthographic conventions make them visible. At the same time, it included loans from Church Slavonic and incorporated Polonisms, in particular in vocabulary and syntax. The *prostaja mova* was supra-regional and had strong usage norms but was not explicitly codified with rules and admissible structures laid down authoritatively. As a result, it retained a degree of variability with respect to its supra-dialectal, Polish and Church Slavonic elements. *Prostaja-mova* traditions continued into the 18th c., especially in the Hetmanate, but they were ultimately ousted: in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, including Right-Bank Ukraine, due to the ever-growing dominance of Polish in writing and, among the elites, in speech (see Kurzowa 1983: 18–38; Kurzowa 1993: 28–43; Martel 1938) and because of its amalgamation with Church Slavonic; and in Left-Bank Ukraine, due to the rise of Russian and incipient other, fully vernacular-based means of expression (see Danylenko 2008b).

Prostaja-mova texts are a key source for the study of Middle Ukrainian historical grammar. At a basic methodological level, it is crucial to exclude coeval, typically Cyrillic writing from Ukraine that is predominantly based on Church Slavonic, Polish, or, later, Russian. For the present investigation, I have assembled the following corpus: the *Kyiv Chronicle* (after 1621) from the *Chroniclers of Volhynia and Ukraine*; the *Ostrih Chronicle*, also referred to by its incipit *Necessities selected from Bielski's Chronicle* (between 1637 and 1647); the *L'viv Chronicle* by M. Gunaševs'kyj (1649); the *Xmel'nyk Chronicle* (after 1650); the *Mežyhirja Monastery Chronicle* (after 1700); the *Dobromyl' Chronicle* (after 1700); the Cossack *Chronicle of an Eyewitness* (after 1702); the Cossack *Chronicle by Samijlo Velyčko* (after 1720); the *Černihiv Chronicle* (after 1725); the *Žytomyr Books of Municipal and Court Records* (1590, 1635), and the *Poltava Court Records* (1668–1740). These texts are generally considered to belong to the written tradition in the *prostaja mova* (see Shevelov 1979: 576–8 and 708),

representing two of its key genres: chronicles and legal documents. They originate from Western, Northern, Central and Eastern Ukraine and deal with matters exclusively or predominantly relating to Ukrainian-speaking areas. Their linguistic make-up is certainly not uniform. However, a proper, stylometrically informed analysis that is not based on selectively chosen features or examples would require a comprehensive and fully annotated Middle Ukrainian corpus, which remains an important research desideratum (see Section 1). In its absence, the methodology summarised by Shevelov (1974) remains instrumental to delimit Ukrainian and Belarusian texts of the middle period. The texts considered in the present section show vernacular 'substitutions' and 'departures from the established general [supra-dialectal *prostaja-mova*, JF] standard' (Shevelov 1974: 150) which point towards a background in (i) Southern Ukrainian, or (ii) Northern Ukrainian, that is to say Polissian. For instance, in the texts studied, **ě* is either (i) kept intact as *jat'*, <ѣ>, as in most of the *Chronicle by Samijlo Velyčko*; or (ii) changed to <е> if unstressed as evidenced in the *Kyiv Chronicle*; in contrast to <е> in all positions in Belarusian proper.[10] What is more, the corpus assembled for this section represents the later stages of the *prostaja mova*, which, in general, is characterised by increasing regional vernacularisation (see Danylenko 2008b: 95–102; Shevelov 1980: 148–51). For instance, Rusanivs'kyj (2001: 129) considers the language of the *Chronicle of an Eyewitness* particularly 'natural'. None of this, however, means that any of our texts in the *prostaja mova* represent the vernacular proper, not even in its later and latest stages as selected for the corpus considered for this section.

The constitution of the corpus was guided by an important practical consideration too. The texts and text fragments are available in basic electronic form and therefore searchable for word forms.[11] It was, thus, possible to conduct a count of the occurrence of the transitive *have*- vs. the intransitive locative *be*-possessive, both in the affirmative and the negative. The count needed to take into consideration two important prerequisites.

First, it was necessary to make sure that the count captured all morpho-phonological variants in which the verb 'have' could appear. To witness, in the texts studied these are: (i) *mati*, (ii) *měti* and the Northern Ukrainian variant *meti*, (iii) *iměti*[12] and the verbal forms derived from these infinitive stems, as well as those derived from their present-tense stems in *-j-*.[13] The *i*-less forms in (i) and (ii) are vernacular (see Danylenko 2002: 111–3). Those in (iii) reflect (Old) Church Slavonic and, thus, appear more bookish. A fourth form, *imati*, is in principle possible too. However, in the texts studied for this section, the verb only appears in

[10] The *Žytomyr Municipal and Court Records* do not conform to this generalisation. They show <е> irrespective of stress. One would, however, be misled to interpret this as a narrow Belarusian feature in these texts. Rather, it must represent an orthographic convention in the local administrative style (see Mojsijenko 2004: 7–9), not least because the records very occasionally also display <ѣ> and even <и> for **ě* in stressed syllables. Thus, in these texts, <е> must be viewed as a specific Polissian orthographic solution to represent the phoneme /e/ in unstressed syllables and the diphthong /iɛ/ in stressed syllables (see Bunčić 2015: 284).

[11] The chronicles are available in electronic form at http://litopys.org.ua/ (15 July, 2025). These are digitisations of standard paper editions that are considered philologically reliable. Parkhomenko (2016) used them to build a very selectively annotated Middle Ukrainian corpus, available from here: https://hu.berlin/diauk (15 July, 2025). Her corpus work also included spot checks that confirmed the reliability of the digitisations at http://litopys.org.ua/ against the paper editions (see Parkhomenko 2016: 9–13 for the list of editions). For the purpose of the present study, it proved more suitable to use the original resource, namely http://litopys.org.ua/, for the digitised versions of the chronicles. Parkhomenko's corpus also includes other texts, including Mojsijenko (2004) and Čepiha & Štandenko (2017). These are the philological paper editions of the administrative texts used for the present study; that is, the court files of the Žytomyr town administration (1590, 1635) and the Poltava court records (1668–1740). For these texts, I have used the relevant sections of Parkhomenko's corpus. I conducted spot checks against the paper editions, which suggest that the electronic versions of the texts are reliable.

[12] The romanisation of examples in this section follows the scientific transliteration system for Church Slavonic Cyrillic.

[13] The older, athematic present-tense stem of Church Slavonic *iměti*, 1SG *imamĭ* etc. is attested only twice in the texts studied for this section. This is the present-active participial form *imušč-* 'having' in the *Kyiv Chronicle*, which may be considered lexicalised.

its primary meaning ‘take’, rather than ‘have’. It is noteworthy that *mati* ‘have’ also regularly occurs as a modal auxiliary (see (i) in fn. 9) as well as, in the legal documents, as the reflexive *mati sja* ‘to be available’, ‘to be in evidence’. These instantiations were equally excluded from the count as they do not encode predicative possession.

The second prerequisite for an accurate count of *have-* vs. *be*-possessive in the *prostaja-mova* texts and fragments selected for the present section concerns the *be*-possessive. The count must exclude sentences that are locative or existential (see fn. 6). Yet ambiguities may still arise and leave sentences open to a possessive or a locative reading. For (8), a possessive interpretation is more likely, but a locative one is possible too.

(8) Takže i u věry ruskoj poměška
also and at faith.GEN.SG Orthodox.GEN.SG discord.NOM.F.SG
velikja bila ot unějat i ksendzov.
great.NOM.F.SG be.PST.F.SG from Uniates and Catholic.priests
‘And also the Orthodox faith (the Orthodox) had some great discord due to Uniates and Catholic priests.’
‘And some great discord was also in the Orthodox faith (among the Orthodox) due to Uniates and Catholic priests.’ (*Chronicle of an Eyewitness*)

I apply the principle that the possessive reading must be conceivable in the given context for a token to be included in the count. Typical contextual cues for this are the word order topicalising the possessor (see Section 2), the indefiniteness of the possessee, or a non-transient relation between the possessor and the possessee (see McAnallen 2011a: 44–8).

Ambiguities may also arise in the case of external possession (for a recent brief survey, see Mazzitelli 2020). In (9), it is likely that external possession is the intended reading but predicative possession is a possible interpretation too due to the word order topicalising the possessor.

(9) U nego na lici sramnyi udove.[14]
at he.GEN.SG on face.LOC.SG shameful.NOM.PL parts.NOM.PL
‘On his face are private parts.’
‘He has private parts on the face.’ (*Kyiv Chronicle*)

Tokens that do not allow for a predicative-possessive interpretation at all must be excluded from the count, such as (10) expressing external possession only.

(10) Sam″ Xmel’nyc’kyj byl″ u neho
himself.NOM.M.SG Xmel’nyc’kyj.NOM.M.SG be.PST.M.SG at he.GEN
v″ nametě.
in tent.LOC.SG
‘Xmel’nyc’kyj himself was in his tent.’
*‘He had Xmel’nyc’kyj himself in the tent.’ (*Černihiv Chronicle*)

The thus configured count yielded the results reported in Table 1. The corpus examples (11) and (12) illustrate the *have*-possessive pattern, (13) and (14) the *be*-possessive pattern.

[14] The sentence is from the first part of the *Kyiv Chronicle*. It derives from the *Primary Chronicle* (Laurentian Codex) where the sentence features a possessive dative, as shown in (i).

(i) Na lici emu sramnii udove.
on face.LOC.SG he.DAT.SG private.NOM.PL parts.NOM.PL
‘He has private parts on his face’

In the given context, the idiom *sramnii udove* ‘male genitalia’ (lit. ‘shameful parts’) marks the individual out as disfigured.

Table 1. Have- vs. *be*-possessive in *prostaja-mova* texts (17th – early 18th c)

Genre	Tokens[a]	*have*-possessive		%	*be*-possessive	%
		maty; *měty*, *mety*	*iměti*[b]			
Chronicles	112,297	158	24	95%	9	5%
Legal texts	406,116	237	–	96%	11	4%

[a]This is the total number of tokens in the texts.
[b]This non-vernacular, Church Slavonic form of the verb occurs predominantly in the *Chronicle by Samijlo Velyčko* (20 out of 24; for an overall assessment of the language of this chronicle, see different views in Rusanivs'kyj 2001: 123–5; and Danylenko 2008b: 102).

(11) Cerkov (...) tilko odni dveri měla.
church.NOM.F.SG (...) only one.ACC.PL door.ACC.PL have.PST.F.SG
'The church (...) had only one door.' (*Poltava Court Records*)

(12) (...) abi žadnich sxadzok i besěd ne iměli.
(...) so.that no.GEN.PL meetings.GEN.PL and talks.GEN.PL NEG have.PST.PL
'(...) so that they wouldn't have any secret meetings and talks.' (*Chronicle by Samijlo Velyčko*)

(13) Ne taljarom″ xvalisja, ot u mene sěm tisjač
NEG taler.INS.SG boast, here at I.GEN seven.NOM thousand.GEN.PL
'Don't boast with a taler, I have seven thousand.' (*Poltava Court Records*)

(14) (...) vody v[15] nix ne bylo.
(...) water.GEN.SG at they.GEN.PL NEG be.PST.N.SG
'(...) they didn't have any water' (that year).
(*Chronicle of an Eyewitness*)

The results reported in Table 1 show that the *have*-possessive prevails over the *be*-possessive by a large margin in the *prostaja-mova* texts studied.[16] They were submitted to further quantitative investigation with respect to the possessor (animate vs. inanimate) and the possessee (abstract vs. concrete) to ascertain whether any correlation emerged with these two factors.[17] However, this was not the case, with the expected exception that inanimate possessors are clearly dispreferred with the *be*-possessive, albeit apparently not impossible altogether (see example (8)[18]). Otherwise, concrete possessees appear in both, the *have*- and the *be*-possessive as easily as abstract possessees, and both inanimate and animate possessors can be the subject of the transitive *have*-possessive. There are general tendencies: inanimate possessors are altogether rare, and abstract possessees are less frequent than concrete ones.

[15] The form of the preposition alternates euphonically between, orthographically, <u> and <v>.

[16] It is instructive to note that the *Dictionary of XVI-XVII c. Ukrainian* is indicative of this too insofar as the attestations for *imati*, *iměti*, *mati*, *měti* 'to have' are much more numerous (see Hryńčyšyn 2006: 107–8, 118–20; Čikalo 2017: 73–9; Čikalo 2022: 252–61) than those for 'possessive' *byti* 'be' (see Hryńčyšyn 1996: 120) and for *v″* + genitive with possessive-like semantics (see Hryńčyšyn 1998: 85–6). However, the volume to include the lemma *u* + genitive is yet to appear.

[17] The relevant figures are as follows: Chronicles: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (71), concrete possessee (111), animate possessor (176), inanimate possessor (6); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (3), concrete possessee (6), animate possessor (8), inanimate possessor (1). Legal texts: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (80), concrete possessee (157), animate possessor (229), inanimate possessor (8); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (1), concrete possessee (10), animate possessor (11), inanimate possessor (0).

[18] Unless the possessor in this example is understood metonymically.

However, this is due to the genre and subject matter of the texts, rather than any principled distributional constraints. Equally, the rarity of the *be*-possessive in the texts studied cannot be attributed to the frequency of inanimate possessors as these are altogether very rare. In short, the key finding is that the transitive *have*-possessive pattern is the norm in the *prostaja-mova* writings examined for this section as reported in Table 1. Importantly, this applies to all the texts; that is, there are no fundamental contrasts between the time and place of their production and between the two genres reviewed.

Given the relevant sociolinguistic context and what we know about the syntax and vocabulary of the *prostaja mova* in other respects, it is plausible to assume that the norm emerged under the influence of literary and written Middle Polish, where transitive *mieć* 'have' was the regular expression for predicative possession. As outlined earlier, the general linguistic situation in early modern Ukraine was characterised by a Church Slavonic – *prostaja-mova* – Polish 'triglossia, with Polish playing the dominant role' (Shevelov 1980: 149). More specifically, Middle Polish writing provided interferential texts or direct sources, including the genres represented in the *prostaja-mova* corpus considered for the present section. For instance, the majority of the extant *Žytomyr Books of Municipal and Court Records* (1582–1776) were in fact in Polish (see Shevelov 1980: 148). Also, Middle Polish chronicles – notably Marcin Bielski's *Polish Chronicle (newly edited by Joachim Bielski, his son)* (1597) and Maciej Stryjowski's *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and all Ruthenia* (1582) – were sources for *prostaja-mova* chroniclers, such as the *Ostrih* and *L'viv Chroniclers* (see Bevzo 1971: 12–98) and the *Chroniclers of Volhynia and Ukraine* (see Rogow 1965). It is not possible here to explore these textological facts in further detail, but it is clear that they also had a demonstrable linguistic effect. For example, the *Žytomyr Books of Municipal and Court Records* that were in the *prostaja mova* ('Ruthenian') show numerous lexical, syntactic and other Polonisms (see Mojsijenko 2004: 30–4). Syntactic and lexical Polish influence in the *prostaja mova* is routinely stated in general terms (see, for example, Moser 2002: 244–5) as well as with reference to particular linguistic features, such as modal expressions, including *(i)meti* as a deontic modal (see Besters-Dilger 2005).

The transitive *have*-possessive in our charters and chronicles was not borrowed from Polish.[19] It was native in form and function. Its normativeness in the *prostaja-mova* texts studied for this section must be viewed as a form of contact-induced frequency effect (see Section 2). After all, it is clear from the texts themselves that the equally native *be*-possessive was available in principle too. One may hypothesise that it was perceived as more colloquial than the *have*-possessive. The more 'bookish' character of the *have*-possessive was aided by its availability and, in fact, frequent use in the gerund construction *majučy* 'having', both in the chronicles and legal texts. If we are dealing with a written and literary norm, it is unlikely that the near-total dominance of the *have*-possessive in the *prostaja-mova* texts studied is representative of a particular form or forms of vernacular Ukrainian. This is not to say that the *have*-possessive was alien to spoken forms of Ukrainian of the time. However, we do not know the distribution of the *have*- vs. the *be*-possessive in the dialects of the Middle Ukrainian period. What can be concluded from the study conducted for this section is that predicative possession was a lexical-syntactic feature in the *prostaja mova* that must have been susceptible to Polish influence. The next section looks at other 18th-c. Middle Ukrainian materials that take us a step closer to a form of vernacular usage of the time than the texts studied for this section.

[19] In contrast, a straightforward borrowing in the texts studied for this section is the Middle Polish negated existential predicate *nie masz* lit. 'you have not'. This is *ni/nemaš* in Middle Ukrainian, with genitive-case marking of the theme argument. The Ukrainian equivalent *nema(je)* 'there is no' does not occur in the texts studied, but other sources do exhibit negated existential *nema(je)*. This makes it an improbable candidate for a direct borrowing from Polish, unlike *ni/nemaš* (see Danylenko 2002: 112).

4. Middle Ukrainian evidence: Interludes

Some dramatic interludes in 17th- and 18th-c. school dramas are in a language that can be considered a more liberally vernacularised 'continuation of the *prostaia mova*' (see Danylenko 2008a: 64–6; Danylenko 2008b: 99–101). They provide some check on the data obtained from the *prostaja-mova* texts studied in the previous section: as to how the near-total dominance of the transitive *have*-possessive in them compares to the expression of predicative possession in a genre that made allowance for more and more diverse vernacular elements. The interludes selected for this section are: (i) the earliest two Ukrainian interludes attested, added to Jakub Gawatowicz's Polish play *A Tragedy, or a Spectacle of the Death of John the Baptist, God's Messenger* (1619); (ii) nine interludes of the late 17th to early 18th c. from a manuscript compilation known as *Dernovo Anthology*; (iii) the *Interlude for Three People: Old Woman, Old Man and the Devil* (after 1719) from a manuscript compilation of the late 17th to early 18th c. from around Lviv; (iv) five interludes each, in the Christmas play *A Comic Act* (1736) and the Easter play *The Power-Endowing Image of Divine Love for Man* (1737) by Mitrofan Dovhalevs'kyj; and (v) five interludes in Heorhij Konys'kyj's play *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1747). It must be stressed that these texts are stylised for comic effect. They include deliberate linguistic distortions and corruptions, such as the merger of dental and postalveolar fricatives in the *Interlude for Three People*, albeit not carried through consequentially, for example <štarosti> (Hudzyj 1960: 95) for ['staros^{j}t^{j}i]. Not all the characters are assigned a form of Ukrainian, but are represented as Polish speakers, as imperfect Ukrainian speakers, or as speakers of other East Slavonic varieties. There are made-up words, for example *han″ča* in the *Father and Son* interlude of the *Dernovo Anthology* (Hudzyj 1960: 50) and markedly colloquial and rare expressions, for example *balahurjat'* 'they talk' in the first interlude to Konys'kyj's play (Hudzyj 1960: 164), including swear words, for example *smerdjux* 'skunk' in the penultimate interlude in the *Dernovo Anthology* (Hudzyj 1960: 79). There are Church Slavonic-inspired linguistic mannerisms for characterisation, for example of the students or scholars in the fourth interlude to Dovhalevs'kyj's Easter play (Hudzyj 1960: 133–7).

The numerous stylisations for comic effect and characterisation notwithstanding, the language of the interludes, in general terms, displays supra-dialectal as well as more narrowly dialectal features, typically Northern Ukrainian (Polissian) ones as in the case of (i), (iv) and (v), and occasionally Western Ukrainian (Galician) ones as in the case of (ii) and (iii) (see Hordyns'kyj 1930: 85–9; Markovs'kyj 1962; Peredrijenko 1979: 34–47 and 81, 127–139; Voznjak 1994 2nd ed.: 226–30, 234–42). The texts considered for this section are available in basic electronic form suitable for a search of *have*- vs. *be*-possessive tokens.[20] The count was conducted along the principles introduced in the previous section. Additionally, those parts of the dialogues that feature characters speaking in idioms other than in Ukrainian-related ones have been excluded for obvious reasons. Table 2 reports the resulting proportions observed for the Gawatowicz, Dohalevs'kyj and Konys'kyj interludes on the one hand ('Northern'), and those of the *Dernovo Anthology* and the *Interlude for Three People* on the other ('Western').

[20] They are available in electronic form at http://litopys.org.ua/ (last consulted 15 July, 2025). This is the digitisation of Hudzyj"s (1960) anthology. It uses the earliest available print or manuscript versions as its sources, but transliterates into Ukrainian Cyrillic the interludes added to Gawatowicz's play.

Table 2. Have- vs. *be*-possessive in interludes (17th – 18th c)

Interludes	Tokens[i]	*have*-possessive		*be*-possessive	
'Northern' (= i, iv, v)	11,000	24	83%	5	17%
'Western' (= ii, iii)	7,500	30	77%	9	23%

[i]This is the approximate total number of tokens in the texts.

The results reported in Table 2 show that the *have*-possessive prevails over the *be*-possessive by a considerable margin in all the interludes studied. As with the chronicles and court records in Section 3 they too were submitted to further quantitative investigation with respect to the possessor (animate vs. inanimate) and the possessee (abstract vs. concrete) to ascertain whether any correlation emerged with these two factors.[21] This was again not the case as far as one can tell from a small corpus, other than the expected exception that inanimate possessors are not attested with the *be*-possessive. More importantly, the comparison with the results reported in Table 1 of Section 3 shows that the interludes, irrespective of regional provenance, match the preference for the transitive *have*-possessive found in the chronicles and court records, albeit not to the same degree. They also show a more frequent use of the *be*-possessive. A telling illustration is the fact where one and the same character uses both patterns in short succession. This is the case in the second part of the eighth interlude of the *Dernovo Anthology*, which is about an argument between a Jew and a 'Ruthenian' whose religion is better and has more holidays. The 'Ruthenian' asserts (15) and (16) in the same turn of the dialogue.[22]

(15) Druhoe zas svjato v nas
second.NOM.N.SG in.turn holiday.NOM.N.SG at we.GEN.SG
– lěto novoe.
– year.NOM.M.SG new.NOM.M.SG
'The second holiday we have is New Year.' (Hudzyj 1960: 81)

(16) Tretoe maem svjato – bohojavlenie.
third.ACC.SG have.PRS.1PL holiday.ACC.SG – Epiphany.ACC.SG
'The third holiday we have is Epiphany.' (Hudzyj 1960: 81)

Equally, in the fourth interlude to Dovhalevs'kyj's Easter play, with two students or scholars taking to painting to try and make a living, the second scholar boasts about the degree of generosity in his school, asserting (17) and (18) in the same turn of the dialogue.

(17) My bo, buvalo, vs'oho podostatku maem.
we.NOM for sometimes all.GEN.SG to.abundance.ADV have.PRS.1PL
'For, we used to have enough of everything.' (Hudzyj 1960: 134).

(18) Velie bjaše čyslo u nas gorělyčě.
large.NOM.N.SG be.PST.IPFV.3SG amount.NOM.N.SG at us.GEN booze.GEN.SG
'We had a large amount of booze' (in our school).[23] (Hudzyj 1960: 134).

[21] The relevant summative figures are as follows: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (13), concrete possessee (41), animate possessor (53), inanimate possessor (1); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (8), concrete possessee (6), animate possessor (14), inanimate possessor (0).

[22] The romanisation of examples in this section and subsequent ones follows the scientific transliteration system for Ukrainian.

[23] In the given context, the sentence shades into an existential one: 'There was a large amount of booze available in our school.'

The evidence of the interludes suggests that both, the *have*- and the *be*-pattern were in principle productive forms of expressing predicative possession in 18th-c. vernacular Ukrainian. The evidence is too scarce though to draw any conclusions about their regional distribution and relative frequency in spoken forms of Ukrainian at the time. Also, and crucially, the language of the interludes was still literary and clearly stylised. It is likely that the high proportion of the *have*-possessive in them represented a continuation of the *prostaja-mova* written and literary convention discussed in Section 3. Yet, this proportion is not as high as in the chronicles and legal records. In the interludes, there is also a somewhat greater allowance for the *be*-possessive, possibly because it was perceived as more colloquial. Vernacular-dialectal data proper are only available for the subsequent period, that is to say for Modern Ukrainian.

5. Modern Ukrainian: Dialectal evidence

The term Modern Ukrainian denotes a period in the history of the language conventionally dated since the late 18th c. It is associated with the first edition of Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj's burlesque-satirical *Aeneid* adaptation in 1798, traditionally considered a key stepping stone towards a new vernacular-based Ukrainian literature and written language (see Rusanivs'kyj 2001: 149–52). By that time, and following the third Polish partition in 1795, large parts of Ukraine were under direct imperial Russian rule and, subsequently, became a constituent republic of the Soviet Union in 1922. Westernmost Galicia remained apart, annexed by Austria in the first Polish partition in 1772 and integrated into the Second Polish Republic in 1918. Following WWII, eastern Galicia was also annexed by the Soviet Union until Ukraine regained independence in 1991.

As far as the language situation is concerned, Taranenko (2007: 120) concluded for Russian- and Soviet-ruled Ukraine that the 'strong influence of the political, cultural, and linguistic presence of Russia in the Ukraine resulted in a bilingual Ukrainian-Russian situation, with Russian as the predominant language', where, also, 'Ukrainian and Russian population language groups mainly live in ethnically and linguistically mixed territories'. The complex extralinguistic processes that led to this outcome have been subject to extensive scholarship on successive periods of imperial Russian and Soviet language policies (for the post-'Ukrainisation' Soviet period from 1933 to 1991, see, for example Grenoble 2003: 54–63, 82–6; Kreindler 1989; Shapoval 2017–2018; Shevelov 1989: 141–74). The resulting forms of imposed bilingualism and societal diglossia were variegated and could be studied without overt ideological bias only since the late 1980s (for a survey of relevant data, see Masenko 2009). It was predominantly Standard Russian in its 'Ukrainian' variant with which Ukrainian speakers, both of Standard Ukrainian and the dialects came into contact (see Taranenko 2007: 123; see also Moser 2022). In Western Ukraine, where Standard Polish remained the prestigious variety until 1939 (see Fellerer 2017–2018), russification ensued only after WWII. It remained less consequential here because of its much shorter time span, the retention of a higher proportion of Ukrainian monolingualism, higher prestige bestowed upon Ukrainian, and its regular use in everyday communication and other domains (see Masenko 2009: 102; Taranenko 2007: 124 and 130–1).

Ukrainian dialectology distinguishes three dialectal macroregions. These are the south-eastern dialects, the northern or Polissian dialects, and the south-western dialects, with further subdivisions in each of them (for the most recent textbook synopses, see Hlibčuk & Kostiv 2024; Del Gaudio 2017). Most of these areas had been under Russian dominion by the third Polish partition of 1795 including Right-Bank Ukraine with Podillia and Volhynia. The western- and southernmost subdialectal regions remained outside imperial Russia and the

Soviet Union until WWII. Based on these macrodivisions, one can conduct a three-way comparative case study of predicative possession in one south-eastern, one northern and one south-western dialect. While there have been plans to create an electronic corpus of Ukrainian dialectal texts (see Siruk 2012), such a corpus hitherto remains a research desideratum (see Section 1).

For the present purposes, a three-way sample corpus has been assembled that employs the following collections of transcribed recordings: Hrycenko (1996: 23–153) for a Polissian, that is to say Northern Ukrainian sample point, Martynova (2012: 25–154) for a south-eastern sample point, and Hlibčuk (2005: 36–113) for a south-western sample point. More specifically, the selected transcriptions record the dialects of respondents from the so-called Černobyl' exclusion zone in Central Polissia (11 former villages, 40 informants born between 1906 and 1948), from the Western Poltava region in the Central Dnieper subdialectal area (56 villages, 78 informants born between 1907 and 1945), and from Lviv and Ivano-Frankivs'k oblasts in the Dniester subdialectal area (15 villages, 24 informants born between 1919 and 1939). The data collection was from the 1990s to the early 2000s. Thus, the respondents mostly belonged to the oldest surviving generation. To control for possible anomalies in these collections, additional dialectal records have been consulted. These are the transcriptions included in Nazarova (1977) from the areas that correspond to those covered in Hrycenko (1996), Martynova (2012), and Hlibčuk (2005); namely, the transcripts of records from (Soviet Ukraine) Kyiv oblast for the northern dialect (10 villages, 16 informants born between 1881 and 1926), Poltava oblast for the south-eastern dialect (14 villages, 21 informants born between 1886 and 1917), and Lviv oblast for the south-western dialect (15 villages, 19 informants born between 1889 and 1922) (Nazarova 1977: 111–38, 431–65, 211–45). The data collection for Nazarova (1977) took place in the 1960s. Thus, the respondents again mostly belonged to the then older and oldest generation. To recapitulate, the dialectal materials consulted for this section represent three particular regional data points which, henceforth, will be referred to as Central Polissian dialect (*seredn'opolis'kyj hovir*), Central Dnieper dialect (*naddniprjans'kyj hovir*), and Dniester dialect (*naddnistrjans'kyj hovir*). They capture the linguistic usage of speakers, born in the late 19th or – most of them – early 20th c., at two synchronic junctures in time: in the 1990s – early 2000s and in the 1960s. It must be noted too that, from these corpus studies, one cannot automatically extrapolate the situation in other, notably earlier periods or in other subdialects within each macroregion.

Scans of the consulted collections of dialectal materials were submitted to optical character recognition. This produced basic electronic versions that could be searched for word forms. It was thus possible to conduct a count of the occurrence of *have*-possessives as opposed to *be*-possessives, both in the affirmative and the negative.[24] The count needed to take into consideration two important prerequisites. First, the search needed to be adjusted to the fact that Ukrainian collections of dialectal materials use a specific phonetic transcription system traditionally adopted in Ukrainian dialectology. The second prerequisite was the same that also applied to the Middle Ukrainian materials considered in Section 3. It concerns the *be*-possessive. Apparent instantiations of it must be excluded if they encode location or external possession, rather than predicative possession. This is the case in examples, such as (19) – with context – and (20).

[24] Hlibčuk (2005) was only available in an image format unsuitable for OCR. The count was, thus, conducted entirely manually for this collection.

(19) Ljudej bulo bahato todi, čotyry z polovynoju tysjači
people was many then four.NOM with half.INS.SG thousand.GEN.SG
u nas bulo i v Maksymovci pivtora tysjači.[25]
at we.GEN be.PST.N.SG and in Maksymovka one.and.half thousand
'There were many people then, four and a half thousand were in our village, one and a half thousand in Maksymovka.'
*'There were many people then, we had four and a half thousand, one and a half thousand in Maksymovka.' (Martynova 2012: 16)

(20) U nas selo to zdorove bulo.
at we.GEN village.NOM.N.SG FOC large.NOM.N.SG be.PST.N.SG
'Our village was large.'
*'We had a large village.' (Hrycenko 1996: 126)

In (19), the intended reading is the presence of a certain number of people in the village, which is evident from the structure of the following clause. In (20), we have a clear case of external possession, which is evident from the fact that demonstrative *to* focalises the adjective and, thus, marks it as the predicative nominal, rather than an attribute.

However, similar sentences may readily shade into predicative possession, as is the case in example (21) about war-time experiences and example (22) about wedding customs.

(21) U nas šče buv kusok toji kovbasy
at we.GEN still be.PST.M.SG piece.NOM.M.SG that.GEN.SG sausage.GEN.SG
'We still had a piece of that sausage.'
'A piece of that sausage was still with us' (in our place of hiding). (Hlibčuk 2005: 92)

(22) U materi v rukax syto z ovsom.
at mother.GEN.SG in hands sieve.NOM.SG with oats
'The mother has a sieve with oats in her hands.'
'A sieve with oats is in the mother's hands.' (Martynova 2012: 24)

The main contextual cue that renders a possessive reading of (21) and (22) felicitous is the topicalisation of the possessor in both sentences.

In short, and as already discussed in Section 3 too, there are no formalised means that distinguish the *be*-possessive construction from constructions that encode a locative or external-possessor relation. The resulting ambiguities require a case-to-case interpretative decision on whether a predicative-possessive reading is possible. The dialectal material studied for this section yielded the results reported in Table 3.

Table 3 shows a near-total dominance of *be*-'have' in the Central Dnieper dialectal texts (97%), its strong dominance in the Central Polissian dialectal texts (88%), as opposed to a clear preference for *have*-'have' in the Dniester dialectal texts (81%) studied for this section. The first conclusion to draw from these findings is that they corroborate an assertation that has often been made, but hitherto not substantiated with actual linguistic data; namely, that the *be*-possessive is preferred in south-eastern varieties in particular, with northern ones also showing a propensity for it, while south-western varieties show a strong preference for the *have*-possessive (see Bevzenko 1980: 167; Žylko 1966: 112; see also Matvijas 2011: 55; Vynnyk 1977: 140–1). Furthermore, and as mentioned in Section 1, this regional division has

[25] The examples are rendered in romanised Modern Standard Ukrainian orthography, rather than in the phonetic transcription of the original. Phonetic details are not relevant for the present section.

Table 3. *Have-* vs. *be*-possessive in Modern Ukrainian dialects

Macro-region	Subdialectal area	Tokens[i]	*have*-possessive	Σ/%	*be*-possessive	Σ/%
South-West	Lviv/Ivano-Frankivs'k regions	35,000	85	113/81%	20	26/19%
	Lviv oblast	9,000	28		6	
South-East	Western Poltava region	58,000	3	6/3%	198	233/97%
	Poltava oblast	9,000	3		35	
North	Central Polissia/Čornobyl' region	50,000	25	26/12%	163	188/88%
	Kyiv oblast	7,000	1		25	

[i]This is the approximate total number of tokens in the dialectal collections considered for this section.

been correlated with possible Russian vs. Polish influence. For the present investigation, this is in fact the key question; namely, whether the relative frequencies in the expression of predicative possession found in the dialectal texts studied may be considered in any way reflective of influence from neighbouring Slavonic languages, or whether indeed they must be considered an outcome owed to the formation of a Ukrainian dialectal continuum without any extraneous influence. The *Ukrainian Dialectal Atlas*, which, roughly, captures the state of Ukrainian dialects in the middle of the 20th c., remains silent on predicative possession.[26] Nor do we have any detailed data on the regional distribution of the *have-* vs. *be*-possessive in the 19th c. or earlier (see Section 3). In other words, there is no independent evidence that could help to decide either way.

Let us first turn to a discussion of the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialect data. The results reported in Table 3 were submitted to further quantitative investigation with respect to the possessor (animate vs. inanimate) and the possessee (abstract vs. concrete).[27] Concrete possessees generally dominate, and inanimate possessors are altogether very rare. This is due to the subject matter of the dialectal recordings, rather than any principled distributional constraints. The *be*-possessive is fully functional with all types of possessee. As expected, it is very rare, but not impossible with inanimate possessors as illustrated in the Central Polissian example (23). Since the *be*-pattern frequently shades into locative semantics in the dialects, it is noteworthy too that one can as easily find examples of it that encode a form of possessive relation without any locative connotations as in (24). Finally, there is also direct evidence of the subject-like behaviour of the genitive-case marked possessor argument, such as control of a reflexive-possessive pronoun as in (25). This, altogether, attests to the wide functionality of the *be*-possessive in the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialects.

(23) Sosna (...) u kotroj obolona, trošečky obolony.
pine.NOM.F.SG (...) at which.GEN.F.SG bark.NOM.SG some bark.GEN.SG
'A pine tree (...) which has bark, some bark.' (Hrycenko 1996: 114)

(24) V mene osvita try klasy.
at I.GEN education.NOM.SG three.NOM grades.NOM.PL
'I have three grades of education.' (Nazarova 1977: 450)

[26] It does provide data for regional variation regarding the syntax of the negated existential construction (see Matvijas 1988: Map 274; Matvijas 2001: 78, 186), but this does not form part of the present investigation.

[27] The relevant figures are as follows: Central Dnieper dialect: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (2), concrete possessee (4), animate possessor (6), inanimate possessor (0); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (23), concrete possessee (210), animate possessor (231), inanimate possessor (2). Central Polissian dialect: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (8), concrete possessee (18), animate possessor (26), inanimate possessor (0); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (23), concrete possessee (165), animate possessor (186), inanimate possessor (2).

(25) Tol'ky u nas svojix žorvon ne bulo.
only at we.GEN REFL millstones.GEN.PL NEG was.PST.N.SG
'Only we didn't have our own millstones.' (Hrycenko 1996: 51)

The *have*-possessive is clearly dispreferred among the Central Polissian and, in particular, Central Dnieper dialect speakers recorded. However, it is still in use. A particularly noteworthy fact, to which I shall return in due course, is that the *have*-possessive is productive not only with abstract, but also with concrete possessees as in the Central Dnieper dialect example (26).

(26) My (...) maly troje rebjatišok.
we.NOM (...) have.PST.PL three.ACC children.GEN.PL
'We (...) had three children.' (Nazarova 1977: 432)

In short, the factorial analysis does not show any qualitative distinctions between the *be*- and the *have*-possessive. However, as we have seen, there is a stark quantitative contrast. To move on to the key issue under discussion, it is plausible to argue that this is, at least to some extent, a contact-induced frequency effect: Contact with Standard Russian must have contributed to the near-total or strong dominance of the *be*-possessive in the speech of the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialect informants recorded for the materials considered for this section. First, these speakers had, at the time of recording, been exposed to Standard Russian in Soviet-ruled Ukraine for decades, presumably in its spoken form in particular, and in domains outside the home, such as work (for example at collective farms), (further) education, institutional contexts. Second, in the transcribed materials Standard Russian borrowings occur regularly; for example[28] *bolezn*' 'illness' (M50), *bol'šinstvo* 'majority' (H41), *konečno* 'of course' (M31), *meždu* 'between' (M51), *nado* 'is necessary' (H83), *naprimer* 'for example' (H63), *oborudovat*' 'equip' (M20), *obratno* 'back' (M58), *obyčno* 'usually' (H28), *oxrana* 'guard' (M19), *ponimat*' 'understand' (M31), *ponravit'sja* 'like' (H49), *prostranstvo* 'space' (H118), *sejčas* 'now' (M74), *sobirat'sja* 'to gather' (M6), *soglasit'sja* 'to agree' (M74), *tože* 'also' (M14), *voobšče* 'generally' (H48), *vremja* 'time' (M15), *xvatat'* 'be sufficient' (H50), *ženščina* 'woman' (M74), *žizn'* 'life' (H31). This does not mean that the materials are in a variety which Bilaniuk (2004: 417–418) classified as 'village-dialect surzhyk', but it does attest to colloquial Standard Russian influence on the regional vernacular, at least as far as the lexicon is concerned. Third, a purely dialectological explanation of the near-total or very strong dominance of the *be*-possessive in the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian speakers' dialects recorded in the 1990s – early 2000s and in the 1960s meets with difficulties: If the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive variation is organised along a dialectal continuum from west to east,[29] Central Polissia and Dnieper Ukraine are possible areas of transition (see Chambers & Trudgill 2012: 104–24). If so, then the frequency of the *be*-possessive in the materials studied for this section seems out of proportion; in other words too high for a transitional area, and, therefore, open to an explanation that is not purely dialectological, but also contact-linguistic. Fourth, and finally, we do not know the historical distribution of the *have*- vs. the *be*-possessive in the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialects at, for example, the turn from the 18th to the 19th century. We have some indication from 18th-c. interludes with Northern

[28] The examples are given in their Standard Russian orthographic dictionary form in transliteration. Their phonetic and morphological integration into the dialectal Ukrainian discourse is not relevant for the present purposes. 'H' refers to Hrycenko (1996), 'M' to Martynova (2012), followed by the page for an illustrative token. The items may occur several times across the collections.

[29] It is generally accepted that the Central Dnieper dialect is the oldest within the very large South-Eastern Ukrainian dialectal areal, which had formed as a result of colonisation from South-Western and Northern Ukraine by, roughly, the Middle Ukrainian period (see Hlibčuk & Kostiv 2024: 421–8, 436–42, 453–8, 468–75).

Ukrainian dialectal traits. Their preference for the *have*-possessive must reflect the productivity of this pattern in the vernacular at least in some measure, even if literary and written *prostaja-mova* traditions clearly play a strong part in this too, as argued in Section 4. In a similar vein, the late 18th- and early 19th-c. vernacular standard of the Poltavan Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj also attests to ample use of transitive *maty* 'have' (see Vaščenko et al. 1955). This contrasts with the data in Table 3, which suggests that, by the second half of the 20th c., there was a shift towards the *be*-possessive among Central Polissian and Central Dnieper dialect speakers.

In sum, the four arguments just outlined support the view that contact with Standard Russian, in particular in its colloquial, spoken form, increased the usage frequency of the *be*-possessive in the vernacular-dialectal data under review here; as an instantiation of what Taranenko (2007: 124), with special reference to the period post-1933, described as 'Russian language elements spread[ing, JF] further into the structure of the Ukrainian language, both in its standard form and even more in popular language.' Adapting van Coetsem's (1988: 7–12) terms, we can speak of a form of recipient-language speaker agentivity (Central Polissian and Central Dnieper dialects) adapting a frequency pattern in the source language (colloquial, spoken Standard Russian). This does not involve any borrowing, as the *be*- and *have*-possessive are both existing patterns across Ukrainian. Nor does it involve any grammatical change. In fact, there is clear indication that the Central Polissian and Central Dnieper dialects studied may have adapted the very high frequency of the *be*- over the *have*-possessive under the influence of colloquial Standard Russian. However, they did not borrow any underlying distributional regularities. Most tellingly, and as mentioned above, they retained the productivity of the *have*-possessive in contexts where it is strongly dispreferred in Russian, notably with a concrete possessee as in example (26). There is also another indication of the fact that the expression of predicative possession in the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialects kept some independence from Russian. In the materials studied for this section, they consistently retain the native suppletive predicate *nema(je)* 'there is no' for the present-tense form of the *be*-possessive under negation (see (4) in Section 2). In contrast, Russian has *net(u)* 'there is no', going back to contracted **ne je tu* 'is not here' and, thus, derived from *byt'* 'be'.

These markers of independence from the Russian model confirm that the Central Dnieper and Central Polissian dialectal data allow for an analysis in terms of a contact-induced quantitative, but not qualitative effect on the expression of predicative possession. The quantitative effect may have acted upon an existing dialect-internal development. That is, colloquial Standard Russian may have contributed to, or promoted, the frequent use of the *be*- over the *have*-possessive, rather than caused it wholesale. It did so as a contact language imposed from above. In the case of Central Polissian, consideration should in principle also be given to the possibility of contact with areally contiguous South-Western Belarusian dialects. Del Gaudio's recent dialectological fieldwork focuses on the region to the east; namely, the Eastern Polissian Černihiv and adjacent Belarusian Homel'-Loeŭ regions, with the Russian Brjansk region very close too. Interestingly, the examples of predicative possession from these lands are all according to the *be*-pattern (see Del Gaudio 2022a: 253; Del Gaudio 2022b: 104; Del Gaudio 2023: 31). If this is owed to the transitionality of Eastern Polissian towards adjacent Belarusian dialects, then this could also be relevant for Central Polissian. However, Standard Russian impositions and the adjacency of dialectal Russian must be relevant factors in Eastern Polissian too. The *Belarusian Dialectological Atlas* (Avanesaŭ et al. 1963) does not include expressions of predicative possession and, thus, does not elucidate the matter further. Nor does Standard Belarusian, which in fact uses transitive *mec'* 'have' as a largely, albeit not entirely unrestricted competitor of the *be*-possessive (see Section 2; Mazzitelli 2015: 165–72).

Turning to the third group of dialectal data examined for this section, they are, to recapitulate, from the Dniester subdialectal area and represent the usage of speakers who were born in the late 19th – early 20th c., and who were recorded at two synchronic junctures in time: in the 1990s – 2000s and in the 1960s. Here, as the figures in Table 3 show, the *have*-possessive prevails over the *be*-possessive by approximately 4:1. The overall quantification was again broken down according to the type of possessor (animate vs. inanimate) and type of possessee (abstract vs. concrete).[30] This shows that both, the *have*- and *be*-possessive are fully functional with all types of possessee. As expected, the *be*-possessive is not attested with inanimate possessors, but they are altogether very rare in the materials studied. This leaves the key question for the present investigation: whether the overall preponderance of the *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialect may be considered in any way reflective of influence from neighbouring Polish, or whether indeed it must be considered an outcome owed to the formation of a Ukrainian dialectal continuum without any extraneous influence. First to note is that there is no evidence to suggest that, historically, there was a substantial increase of the *have*-pattern in South-Western Ukrainian. If the language of the interludes, such as the *Dernovo Anthology* of the late 17th- to early 18th c., is in fact in some measure reflective of the vernacular, including south-western varieties (see Section 4), then the high frequency of the *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialectal materials studied for this section can be first and foremost understood dialect-internally too. In other words, it may represent the western end of a Ukrainian and, possibly, wider East Slavonic dialectal continuum along which the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive variation is organised. However, this is not incompatible with accommodating the assumption that contact with Polish sustained or enhanced the frequency of the *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialect (see Savyc'kyj 2006: 48). Not only was Standard Polish the prestigious variety in the area until WWII. The Lviv, Ivano-Frankivs'k and neighbouring regions were also an area of close and long-standing vernacular contacts between the Dniester dialect and South-Eastern 'Borderland' Polish. In fact, one can conceive of historical Galicia as a Polish-Ukrainian convergence area. The linguistic impact worked in both directions, on South-Eastern 'Borderland' Polish as well as on South-Western Ukrainian dialects (for the latter, see, for example, Dyka 2010; Horbatsch 1968; Łesiów 1998: 399–401; Rieger 1997). Thus, the use of *mieć* 'have' as the default expression of predicative possession in Standard Polish and in the dialect could enhance or sustain the high frequency of the Ukrainian *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialect. It is telling that, even in the specific area of predicative possession, the influence also worked in the opposite direction, albeit mainly in Northern, rather than South-Eastern 'Borderland' Polish. One of its features is the use of the *be*-possessive under Belarusian and, later, Russian influence (see Bednarczuk 2017: 105–6 and 109; Kurzowa 1993: 305–6).

In sum, this section examined the relative frequency of the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive in select Central Dnieper, Central Polissian and Dniester dialectal data collected in the 1960s and late 1990s to 2000s with speakers born from the late 19th c. to the first decades of the 20th c. They confirm a clear regional contrast: a preponderance of the *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialect as opposed to a strong or near-total preference for the *be*-possessive in Central Polissian and the Central Dnieper dialect. This regional distribution is not incompatible with an explanation in terms of a 'west-to-east' dialectal continuum. Yet, the very high proportion of the *be*-possessive in Central Polissian and the Central Dnieper dialect, in conjunction with the relevant sociolinguistic context and other language-contact traces in the materials studied, points towards colloquial Standard-Russian influence too. Similarly, the sustained

[30] The relevant figures are as follows: *have*-possessive: abstract possessee (41), concrete possessee (72), animate possessor (109), inanimate possessor (4); *be*-possessive: abstract possessee (7), concrete possessee (19), animate possessor (26), inanimate possessor (0).

preponderance of the *have*-possessive in the Dniester dialect, in conjunction with the high significance of Polish-Ukrainian language contacts in the Dniester dialectal area until WWII, points towards a convergence dynamic with Standard and dialectal Polish. To be precise, the 'site' of such contact-induced frequency effects promoting or sustaining native dialectal patterns is not the dialect area, but the recipient-language speakers themselves (see van Coetsem 1988: 7–12).

6. Modern Standard Ukrainian: Contemporary evidence

The beginnings of vernacular-based Modern Standard Ukrainian date back to the late 18th c. and the first edition of Kotljarevs'kyj's *Aeneid* (1798) (for a survey of its 19th- and 20th-c. history, see Rusanivs'kyj 2001: 146–378). The most consequential recent extralinguistic event was Ukraine's regaining of independence in 1991, ushering in the period to which the present section refers to as contemporary Standard Ukrainian. The external developmental factors fundamentally changed in this period; notably, the legal status of Ukrainian, attitudes towards it, its domain-specific usage, and its spread as a first language. These are topics that have been widely debated and investigated (see, for example, Arel 2017–2018; Besters-Dilger 2009; Kulyk 2017–2018; Moser 2017; Zaliznjak & Masenko 2001). The consequences for the standard language itself and its use have been submitted to a wide-ranging discussion by Taranenko (2024). One aspect of it is of particular significance in the context of the present section: Overall, Russian influence in contemporary Standard Ukrainian is diminishing, in particular in normative, prescribed usage, even though, for the time being, it continues or even expands in some other respects, such as lexical loans and switches for specific communicative purposes and symbolic functions (see Taranenko 2024, vol. 1: 455–506).

The present section reviews contemporary Standard Ukrainian corpus data. The aim is to examine them for any evidence, or lack thereof, of language contact playing a role in the expression of predicative possession, either in terms of frequency patterns or any other manifestation. We shall start by exploring the relevant data. They come from the *General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian* (*GRAC*).[31] The sources for this corpus predominantly are electronically published texts in Modern Standard Ukrainian, starting from 1816, and including a wide range of genres, such as literary prose in the original and translation, journalistic prose, academic writing, textbooks, religious texts, private correspondence, memoirs, social media posts, written-up interviews, speeches. Version 16 (*GRAC-16*) reaches the year 2022 and has an overall size of 1.875 billion tokens. The number of texts since ca. 2000 grows exponentially, with ever fewer texts further into the past. The corpus has metatextual annotations, including variables such as style and genre. Texts are attributed to six macroregions, which are Western Ukraine, the city of Kyiv, Eastern, Central, Northern and Southern Ukraine. The attribution is based on locating authored texts to the author's (or translator's) place of birth, study or continuous residence, and anonymous media texts to the place of publication. Texts from the western and Kyiv-city macroregions are best represented, making up more than two thirds of the corpus. The regional division into six macroregions is oblast-based, hence administrative, but it roughly maps onto the main dialectal divisions of Ukrainian too (see Section 5). The corpus is annotated morphologically and, to some extent, semantically; the latter based on a new Ukrainian semantic lexicon that, so far, includes frequent lemmas only. For the morphological annotations, the corpus uses the

[31] See Shvedova, Maria; von Waldenfels, Ruprecht; Yaryhin, Serhij; Rysin, Andriy; Starko, Vasyl; Nikolajenko, Timofij et al., 2017–2023. *GRAC: General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian*. Kyiv, Lviv, Jena. Available at https://uacorpus.org/ (last consulted 15 July, 2025).

Large Electronic Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language (*VESUM*)[32] as a natural language processing tool to automatically assign tokens to lemmas and tag them morphologically (see Rysin & Starko 2020).

However, this routinely produces ambiguous annotations. Large-scale searches of the corpus, thus, need to be coded in a way that minimises the capture of wrong tokens. For the present purpose, the most suitable queries to that end target the *have*- and *be*-possessives in their basic affirmative and negated configurations as illustrated in (1)–(4) in Section 2.[33] This excludes word order permutations and phrases with adnominal dependents. For the randomly chosen contemporary period of 2011 to 2015, the thus configured searches yield the results reported in Table 4.

Table 4. *Have*- vs. *be*-possessive in contemporary Standard Ukrainian, 2011–15 (*GRAC-16*)

Macroregion	*have*-possessive		*be*-possessive	
	Σ	%	Σ	%
Western Ukraine	34,802 (18.56 per million)[i]	83%	7,013 (3.74 per million)	17%
Kyiv and Central Ukraine	52,519 (28.00 per million)	82%	11,167 (5.96 per million)	18%
Southern, Northern and Eastern Ukraine	9,477 (5.06 per million)	78%	2,651 (1.32 per million)	22%

[i] This is the number of occurrences per million tokens related to the whole corpus (1.875 billion tokens).

Table 5 provides the results of an identically configured, comparative check for the years 2001–2005.

Table 5. *Have*- vs. *be*-possessive in contemporary Standard Ukrainian, 2001–2005 (*GRAC-16*)

Macroregion	*have*-possessive		*be*-possessive	
	Σ	%	Σ	%
Western Ukraine	14,805 (7.89 per million)	86%	2,414 (1.29 per million)	14%
Kyiv and Central Ukraine	9,589 (5.11per million)	82%	2,147 (0.98 per million)	18%
Southern, Northern and Eastern Ukraine	3,912 (2.08 per million)	85%	692 (0.37 per million)	15%

From the data reported in Tables 4 and 5, two results emerge: First, in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian the expression of predicative possession is not subject to regional differences. The proportions of the *have*- and the *be*-possessive are very similar irrespective of the regional provenance of the texts. The differences in absolute numbers are due to the above-mentioned fact that Western Ukraine and Kyiv are much better represented in the corpus than the other regions. The homogenous pan-Ukrainian distribution of the two possessive expressions in evidence from Tables 4 and 5 contrasts with the dialectal data reported in Section 5. They showed a clear regional differentiation, with the northern Central Polissian dialect and the south-eastern Central Dnieper dialect giving strong or near-total preference to the *be*-possessive as opposed to the south-western Dniester dialect giving preference to the *have*-possessive. Second, the results suggest that the expression of predicative possession in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian takes the form of a stable

[32] See https://vesum.nlp.net.ua (last consulted 15 July, 2025).

[33] Thus, the searches were configured and further adjusted such that they targetted the following strings (with the verbs in their various finite and non-finite forms); for the *have*-possessive: *maty* + N_{acc}, *ne maty* + $N_{gen\ /\ acc}$; and for the *be*-possessive: *u* / *v* N_{gen} / Pro_{gen} + *buty* + N_{nom}, *u* / *v* N_{gen} / Pro_{gen} + *ne buty* / *nema(je)* + N_{gen}.

quantitative split, with the *have*-possessive taking a larger and the *be*-possessive a smaller, but still significant share at a proportion of ca. 4:1. This differs from the normativeness of one variant, as seen with the *have*-possessive in the *prostaja-mova* sample in Section 3.

The data set reported in Table 4 was submitted to further quantitative investigation with respect to the semantic profile of the possessor (animate vs. inanimate) and the possessee (abstract vs. concrete). First to note is that the *be*-possessive occurs almost exclusively with animate, mostly human possessors. It does so to an extent that requires no further detailed quantification here. This outcome is expected and applies to East Slavonic generally. For the semantic profile of the possessee, Table 6 provides relevant figures. It must be flagged that it reports on a subset of the data summarised in Table 4; namely, the proportion of affirmative *have*- and *be*-possessive with a concrete and an abstract possessee.

Table 6. Concrete vs abstract possessives with affirmative *have*- vs. *be*-possessive in contemporary Standard Ukrainian, 2011–15 (*GRAC-16*)

Primary semantic tag[i]	Abstract		Concrete		Other	None	Σ
	Σ	%	Σ	%			
have-possessive	30,153	39%[ii]	8,940	12%	120	37,417	76,630
be-possessive	4,286	27%	4,468	28%	48	7,141	15,943

[i]Nouns may have several semantic tags, including primary ones other than abstract or concrete ('other'). The semantic annotation of *GRAC* is incomplete; hence, the large proportion of tokens without a tag ('none').
[ii]The percentages are in relation to the total number of tokens.

The results reported in Table 6 do not suggest that the concreteness vs. abstractness of the possessee constitutes a principled semantic criterion for the choice of either expression of predicative possession in the contemporary written Standard Ukrainian data studied. To be sure, the *have*-possessive shows a stronger association with abstract possessees than the *be*-possessive, but neither of them exclude the opposite type of possessee. Both, the *be*- and the *have*-possessive freely allow for concrete as well as abstract possessees, as the following quasi-minimal pairs (27)–(28), (29)–(30) and (31)–(32) from the corpus illustrate:

(27) Maju mriju zrobyty audioal'bom.
have.PRS.1SG dream.ACC.SG make.INF audio collection
'I have the dream to make an audio collection' (of recorded poetry readings). (*GRAC-16*; Kyiv newspaper *Den'*, 2011)[34]

(28) U mene bula mrija – kupyty antykvarnu mašynu.
at me.GEN be.PST.F.SG dream.NOM.F.SG – buy.INF classic car
'I had a dream – to buy a classic car.' (*GRAC-16*; Kyiv-based news site *LB.ua*, 2012)

(29) Koly vona maje zastudu, to ne probižyt jiji.
when she.NOM have.PRS.3SG cold.ACC.SG then NEG runs her
'When a person has a cold they won't be able to run it' (the distance). (*GRAC-16*; Kyiv weekly *Ukrajins'kyj tyžden'*, 2014)

[34] The *GRAC* references are supplemented by a short indication of the provenance of the example.

(30) Prychodyt' do mene z temperaturoju 38, tomu ščo v neji
comes to me with temperature 38 because at her.GEN
zastuda.
cold.NOM.SG
'She comes to me with a temperature of 38 because she has a cold.' (*GRAC-16*; Kyiv-based online news site *LB.ua*, 2012)

(31) Ja ne mav velosypeda, – kaže Vitja
I.NOM NEG have.PST.M.SG bike.GEN.SG – says Vitja
'I didn't have a bike, says Vitja.' (*GRAC-16*; Tymofij Havryliv, Ivano-Frankivs'k/Kyiv, 2011)

(32) Junak (...) mav by znaty, ščo u nyx nikoly ne
young.man (...) should COND know that at they.GEN never NEG
bulo velosypeda.
be.PST.N.SG bike.GEN.SG
'The young man (...) should have known that they never had a bike.' (*GRAC-16*; Lviv newspaper *Vysokyj zamok*, 2012)

This concludes the report of the data obtained from the sample studies of *GRAC-16*. To recapitulate, they capture two recent synchronic junctures in the development of written Standard Ukrainian, the years 2011–2015 and 2001–2005. From them, one cannot extrapolate the relative frequency of the two variant expressions of predicative possession in earlier periods of the development of Modern Standard Ukrainian. Synchronic studies for other junctures in time, notably pre-1991, might yield different results. For those obtained here, we shall now turn to the question of whether they show any evidence of language contact possibly having a frequency effect on the expression of predicative possession in contemporary Standard Ukrainian. Based on the data reported above, there is no indication of language contact playing a direct role, in terms of either the observed frequency pattern or any other manifestation. To be sure, this is as much as was already implied in the outline in Section 2, yet without the data provided in this section. Since Standard Russian, both written and colloquial, has the *be*-pattern as the primary way of expressing predicative possession, it makes it an improbable contributor to the frequency pattern observed in contemporary Standard Ukrainian. This is further corroborated by the fact that the contemporary Standard Ukrainian *have*-possessive readily combines with all types of concrete and abstract nouns, for example denoting illness and mental states (see examples (27), (29), (31)), which are dispreferred or impossible possessees with Russian *imet'* 'have'. Turning to Polish, this might appear to be a more probable source of extraneous support or enhancement of the observed contemporary Standard Ukrainian preponderance of the *have*-possessive because transitive *mieć* 'have' is the default in Standard Polish. Yet, Polish influence severely diminished after WWII and, thus, is also an unlikely direct contributor to the observed frequency pattern in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian.

It may be viewed as an indirect one, mediated through prescriptivist attitudes towards the *have*- vs. *be*-pattern variation. As Taranenko (2024, vol. 2: 174–6) points out, there has been a long-standing (wrong) prescriptivist view, often reiterated since 1991, that the *be*-possessive is alien to Ukrainian and of Russian provenance. To be sure, there are no codified rules regarding predicative possession. The prescriptivist view held by various commentators accords the *have*-variant the prestige of being the genuinely Ukrainian expression of predicative possession. It also readily combines with the (correct) perception that the *have*-

possessive is particularly characteristic of spoken Standard Ukrainian as in use in Western Ukraine and a native feature enhanced or sustained through contact with Polish (see Taranenko 2024, vol. 1: 611; Section 5). In that sense, there is an indirect connection between prescriptivist attitudes and contact-induced frequency effects regarding the prestige of the *have*-possessive in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian.

However, this is clearly not sufficient to call upon language contact as a substantive factor contributing to the relative frequency of the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive in the data gathered for this section. They suggest that contemporary written Standard Ukrainian has a stable split system, rather than one in 'a state of transition' as posited by Isačenko (1974: 44). It gives clear quantitative preference to the *have*-possessive, but also retains the *be*-possessive to a smaller, but still significant extent. It goes beyond the scope of the present study to offer a comprehensive variationist analysis. The remainder of the section shall outline the issue and advance some hypotheses. The main task is to identify relevant independent factors with which the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive variation can be shown to correlate, both linguistic and extralinguistic ones. As to linguistic factors, it is well known, and has been shown in this study too, that inanimate possessors are strongly dispreferred with the *be*-possessive. Yet, they are generally rare because predicative possession typically involves a human possessor, including in a metonymical sense. The animacy vs. inanimacy of the possessor, therefore, is not a factor that can explain the contemporary Standard Ukrainian *have*- vs. *be*- possessive variation at large. As far as the possessee is concerned, the data examined for this section suggested that it was not a relevant independent factor, at least as far as the opposition concrete vs. abstract is concerned. Both types of possessee combine freely with the *have*- as well as the *be*-possessive. Other independent linguistic factors that pertain to the semantics of the possessive relation and may possibly have an impact on the choice between the *have*- and *be*-possessive are permanent vs. temporary possession and alienability vs. inalienability of the possessee (see, for example, Heine 1997: 34–5; Mazzitelli's 2015: 22–31). These are factors that require further research as far as they can be disambiguated in context.

Turning to independent extralinguistic factors, the *have*- vs. *be*-possessive variation is not, as we saw, subject to diatopic contrasts in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian. It may correlate with pragmatic criteria, such as text type, written vs. spoken standard usage, and the discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the communicative situation (see Danylenko 2002: 119–21). *GRAC-16* allows for iterations of the corpus searches reported in Tables 4 and 5, to the effect that they contrast different text types, such as academic prose vs. fiction, journalism vs. 'author-centred' writing, such as memoirs and letters. Without reporting the corresponding results in detail here, they still show similar proportions to those reported in Tables 4 and 5. Text type, thus, does not appear to be a key criterion, at least in the written medium. This may be different for spoken discourse. As mentioned, *GRAC-16* mainly represents contemporary written Standard Ukrainian, with texts reflecting standard spoken usage, such as interviews and speeches, not (yet) very numerous.

Finally, there is an altogether different line of possible enquiry, focusing on syntactic properties of the competing patterns. The *have*-possessive is a straightforwardly transitive structure. In contrast, it is less obvious what kind of structure the *be*-possessive projects; in particular, whether it shares an underlying syntactic structure with locational *be* – that is to say *X is at Y* – or not. In her study of Russian, Jung (2011: 40; see also Chung 2018: 569) departs from the following key observation pertaining to the grammar of the *be*-possessive: The uninflected third-person present-tense form of *be*, Russian *est'*, may be present, but can be also omitted. This contrasts with the grammar of locative sentences. Here, Russian does not allow for overt *est'*, as illustrated in (33):

(33) Mašina *est' u nas /v garaže.
car.NOM.SG *be.PRS.3SG at we.GEN /in garage.LOC.SG
intended: 'The car is with us (at ours)/in the garage.' (after Jung 2011: 39 & Isačenko 1974: 45)

From this grammatical contrast, Jung (2011: 73–95) draws the conclusion that the locative construction has a different underlying syntactic structure from the possessive.

Applying this line of argument to Standard Ukrainian, a grammatical contrast with Russian emerges. Ukrainian, unlike Russian, does allow for the overt use of the uninflected third-person present-tense form of *be*, *je*, not only in possessive sentences (see Section 2) but also in locative ones as shown in (34):

(34) Avto je u nas /v haraži.
car.NOM.SG is at we.GEN /in garage.LOC.SG
'The car is with us (at ours)/in the garage.'

If in Ukrainian, unlike Russian, no principled grammatical difference between locative and possessive *be*-sentences can be found, one might conclude that they share one and the same underlying syntactic structure. In general descriptive terms, this joint structure contains *be*, a Theme argument, and a Location argument, as per (35) after Błaszczak (2018: 639):

(35) BE [NP_{THEME} $PP_{LOCATION}$]

When the Theme moves into a higher position (for example [Spec,IP]), this yields a locative sentence. When the Location moves into a higher position, this yields an existential sentence. It asserts the existence of the Theme as such, or in the domain of the Location. If that domain, the Location is human, this produces a possessive reading. On this analysis, possessive sentences are a special type of existential sentences, in the sense that they assert the existence of something in the domain of a possessor, usually a human. Whether the existential-possessive or the locative configuration is borne out usually depends on contextual cues, in particular surface word order and intonation.[35] If this analysis is correct for Ukrainian, it makes the prediction that the *be*-possessive retains a locative connotation or allows for an alternative locative reading. This is straightforwardly the case in an example such as (1) from Section 2, repeated here as (36), in the present tense, for ease of reference.

(36) U brata je dytyna.
at brother.GEN.SG be.PRS.3SG child.NOM.SG
'(My) brother has a child.'
'A child is at (my) brother's/with (my) brother.'

Whether this holds true more generally needs to be put to the test and cannot be concluded from this brief outline of a syntactically driven line of enquiry into the variation of the *be*- vs. *have*-possessive in contemporary Standard Ukrainian.

The conclusion which can be drawn from the discussion of the *GRAC-16* data (2011–2015, 2001–2005) considered for this section is that the *have*-possessive prevails over the *be*-possessive in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian across all regions. This may, to some extent, be motivated by prescriptivist views that give preference to the *have*-possessive. It reflects colloquial Standard Ukrainian usage in Western Ukraine, where Polish played a role in sustaining or enhancing the native pattern. For the most part, however, contemporary Standard Ukrainian has a contact-independent split system of expressing predicative

[35] To be sure, the Russian *be*-construction may produce the same ambiguity. However, unlike Ukrainian, it never does if *est'* is overt because this forces out a possessive or existential reading.

possession. The underlying distributional regularities await further corpus research. Extralinguistic independent factors, notably spoken vs. written medium and the discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the communicative situation, may prove to be of particular importance. An alternative line of enquiry is syntactic and derives the specifics of the Ukrainian *be*-possessive from its shared underlying structure with locative sentences. In general, it is difficult to agree with Chinkarouk (2008: 192) that 'les deux constructions s'emploient tout à fait librement' because of the clear frequency contrast between the *have*- and *be*-possessive in contemporary written Standard Ukrainian.

7. Conclusion

The present study offered an investigation into the expression of predicative possession in varieties of Ukrainian from the 17th to the 21st c. Both, a transitive *have*-possessive and an intransitive locative *be*-possessive are native to Ukrainian. The variation has played out in different ways at different times. The key question of the study has been whether contact with neighbouring Russian, Polish, and Belarusian may have contributed, or not, to the relative frequency of the two expressions of predicative possession in varieties of Ukrainian. The varieties looked into in more detail were (i) the *prostaja mova*, a supra-dialectal written and literary standard of the Middle Ukrainian period; (ii) its more liberally vernacularised 18th-c. continuation; (iii) subdialects representing the northern, south-eastern and south-western dialectal macroregions as used among older speakers recorded in the 1990s–2000s and 1960s; (iv) contemporary written Standard Ukrainian. The varieties (i)–(iii) were investigated on the basis of self-devised, basic electronic corpora, while (iv) employed the *General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian*. The resulting quantities of the *have*- vs *be*-possessive in each corpus were submitted to the question of whether contact with neighbouring Slavonic varieties may have contributed to the frequencies observed.

Based on areal- and sociolinguistic context factors and evidence of external linguistic influence in other respects, it was argued that such contact-induced frequency effects were indeed plausible for (i)–(iii), but not for (iv). Crucially, these effects do not involve any borrowing. Nor do they overtly counteract language-internal developments. They may in fact promote or sustain them. The study of language contact must still take them into account as one possible and, indeed, important mechanism of source–target language interaction; in particular between closely related varieties that share similar or identical linguistic features.

As to expressions of predicative possession in particular, it is not surprising that language contact should play a role. Nor is this specific to Ukrainian. As Heine (1997: 84, 137–38) points out, it is very likely that language contact has been involved, in different ways, in the development of predicative possession in various regional contexts. In fact, even in the current study, there was mention of the influence of Belarusian and Russian on the expression of predicative possession in Northern 'Borderland' Polish (see Section 5).

Finally, there is also an important limitation to the Ukrainian corpus investigations conducted for this study. They do not yield a history of predicative possession in Ukrainian at large. This is due to diachronic discontinuities, differences between speech and writing, and divergent areal-sociolinguistic settings pertaining to varieties of Ukrainian. The development of electronic corpora of Middle Ukrainian texts and of dialectal data remains an important research desideratum. They could facilitate more complex, data-based variationist, diachronic and synchronic studies into generally variation-rich Ukrainian at large.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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