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Language contact and accent shift in Baltic and Slavic

One of the remarkable differences between Latvian and Lithuanian is the fixed stress of Latvian as opposed to the free stress of Lithuanian. The fixed stress of Latvian has traditionally been attributed to influence from a Finnic substrate, but this explanation has been questioned by Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli (2001: 639) and Hock (2015). Hock argues that the initial stress of Latvian must be connected to the accent retractions in Žemaitian and that this points to an language-internal cause for the retractions. In this paper, it will be argued that the opposite is true: if the fixed stress of Latvian and the retractions in Žemaitian are connected, they are best explained as showing various degrees of influence from Finnic. To support this claim, parallel cases of accent retraction and fixing of stress from Slavic will be adduced. These parallels include Russian and Croatian dialects that underwent the same or similar retractions as Žemaitian (Ter-Avanesova 1989) as well as some Croatian Kajkavian dialects with fixed stress (Ivić 1959: 26).

References

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