

GENITIVE¹

See the chart at 5.4, which will remind you that, in addition to its original functions, the genitive inherited the role of the defunct Indoeuropean “ablative case (= “away from, out of”. In some of its usages this ablative function becomes apparent. In that chart the genitive figures only as a noun complement, yet in translation we have found since that a good number of verbs have a complement in the genitive.

Specifying all the relationships which the English possessive case or the Greek genitive case may denote leads to a long list that has little to do with syntax and much with real world relationships (one example will suffice: “genitive of material”).

We will simply note that, as stated above, the genitive may, 1) depend upon a noun or equivalent or, 2) may be complement of a verb. For the genitive depending upon nouns (adnominal genitive) we will identify a few basic relationships it establishes; for the genitive complement of a verb, we will list a few groups of verbs that, for one reason or another, govern a complement in the genitive. Once again, it will be best to remember complements that are counter-intuitive for an English speaker as part of vocabulary learning.

1) GENITIVE with a noun or equivalent (= of, 's)

- In the most frequent uses, “Y’s X,” or the “X of Y” indicates possession: Y has an X.

Examples with nouns:

τὸ σῶμα παῦλαν ἔχει κινήσεως καὶ παῦλαν ζωῆς.

The body has an cessation of movement and a cessation of life.

Examples with adjectives:

οἶει αὐτοὺς ἀπείρους γραμματῶν εἶναι; [Plato, Republic 26d]

You believe that they are ignorant of letters

- The so-called “partitive” genitive indicates the whole:

οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων (“those remaining among men”) = the rest of mankind

- A *genitive of comparison* denotes the second element of a comparison, expressed by a comparative adjective or, as noted below, a comparative adverb or a verb implying comparison. *μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει* *He will do greater things than these.*
- A *complement of the superlative* is usually in the genitive:
πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνωμονέστατοι the most senseless of all men [Lycurgus 54]

2) GENITIVE COMPLEMENT OF VERBS (“of, from, out of, or sometimes equivalent to an English direct object!”)

These are the most common groups of verbs that govern the genitive:

- Verbs that have as a preverb a preposition governing the genitive (if it is a preposition that governs more than one case, we need to consider the meaning it has with the genitive to interpret the verb)
καὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ μωρίαν κατηγορεῖ ... and he accused the others of foolishness [Xenophon, Memorabilia 1.3.4]
- Verbs meaning to cease, be apart from, want, lack, etc.
λήγειν τῶν πόνων [Isocrates 1.14] to cease from toil
- Verbs expressing the idea of comparison.
ἄρχων ἀγαθὸς οὐδὲν διαφέρει πατρὸς ἀγαθοῦ [Xenophon, Cyropaedia 8.1.1]
a good ruler differs in no respect from a good father
- Verbs that denote sharing touching,
τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος μετείληφεν ἀθανασίας [Plato, Laws 721b]
The human race has received a portion of immortality

ἀναλάβεσθε τῶν πραγμάτων [Demosthenes 1.20]

Take our public policy in hand!

- beginning, aiming at, genitive of the goal.

αἰσχροὺν γὰρ ἄνδρα τοῦ μακροῦ χρῆζειν βίου [Sophocles, Ajax 473]

- remembering,

τῆς τῶν πολλῶν δόξης δεῖ ἡμᾶς φροντίζειν [Plato, Cratylus 48a]

We must pay heed to the world's opinion

- hearing, perceiving,

τινὸς ἤκουσα εἰπόντος

I heard somebody say

τῆς κραυγῆς ἤσθοντο [Xenophon, Hellenica 4.4.4]

They heard the noise

- ruling, etc.

τῆς θαλάσσης ἐκράτει [Plato, Menexenus 239e]

He was master of the sea

Ἔρως τῶν θεῶν βασιλεύει [Plato, Symposium 195c]

Love is king of the gods

- charging, summoning, convicting.
ἐμὲ ὁ Μέλητος ἀσεβείας ἐγράφατο [Plato, Eutyphro 5c]
Meletus prosecuted me for impiety

- **GENITIVE OF THE AGENT:** see **genitive with prepositions**

3) GENITIVE WITH PREPOSITIONS

PREPOSITIONS THAT TAKE ONLY THE **GENITIVE**:

ἀπό + gen = away from, from ἐκ, ἐξ + gen = out of πρό + gen = in front of (space); before (time)

PREPOSITIONS THAT TAKE MORE THAN ONE CASE. **With the genitive they mean:**

ἐπί + gen = on, upon (takes also Accusative)

παρά + gen = with, near to (takes also Accusative and Dative)

πρός + gen = besides (takes also Accusative and Dative)

ὑπό + gen = under (takes also Accusative and Dative)

with a passive verb ὑπό + gen = by

GENITIVE OF THE AGENT (see 8.2b)

4) **GENITIVE ABSOLUTE**

When a noun or pronoun in the genitive is accompanied by a participle in the genitive *not attached* to any particular element of a main clause, such a construction is called **genitive ab-solute**. It is usually equivalent to an adverbial clause indicating a circumstance of the main verb's action: condition, cause, time, etc.

- (Ἐτι λαλοῦντος τοῦ Πέτρου τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα)[ἐπέπεσεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον.]

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word.

¹Without adopting their system of classification of genitive functions, I have borrowed some examples and some of their translations from Herbert W. Smyth and Jeffrey A. Rydberg-Cox in Perseus.