

Genitive Case Revisited

Until now we have seen the genitive as a case used for possession, translated “of.” The genitive, however, is used much more widely than that. Its broader meaning is descriptive and often specifies more exactly, defines more precisely, or limits the scope of the word it is connected to. Thus, the genitive has an adjectival function. It also functions like an adverb when it specifies time and place.

Possessive Genitive: may be translated “of” or as possessive noun or pronoun (his/her).

τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς μητρὸς	mother’s womb (John 3:4)
τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ	His glory (John 1:14)

Relational Genitive: specifies a family relationship (son, parent, wife).

ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ	his mother (John 2:5)
Σίμων Ἰωάννου	Simon, son of John (John 21:15)
Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ	Mary, the [wife] of Cleopas (John 19:25)

Descriptive Genitive: qualifies the noun, describing it in more detail.

Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου	the zeal of your house (John 2:17) (describes the type of zeal)
τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ	the temple of his body (John 2:21)

Subjective Genitive: the word in the genitive functions as the subject or produces the action of the verbal idea implied in the noun it describes.

ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς	the lust of the flesh (1 John 2:16) (the flesh lusts)
ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν	the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16) (the eyes lust)

Objective Genitive: The genitive receives the action. It acts like an object to the action of the word it modifies. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes a genitive may be both objective and descriptive.

ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία	the blasphemy against the Spirit (Matthew 12:31)
ὁ θερισμὸς τῆς γῆς	the harvest of the earth (Revelation 14:15)

Time Genitive: genitives of time and agency function like adverbs. Genitives of time express time “within which” something happens.

ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς	he came to him during the night (John 3:2)
ἕως τῶν ἡμερῶν Δαυίδ	until the days of David (Acts 7:45)

Agency Genitive: identifies the agent that has been involved in an action.

ἔσονται πάντες διδασκτοὶ θεοῦ	they shall all be taught by God (John 6:45)
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