

Grammar: the genitive case

Overview

The basic meaning of the genitive is *of*, denoting possession.

This possessive use can be seen in examples such as:

This is my sister's book.

which can also be expressed as

This is the book of my sister.

Keeping in the 'of' helps to avoid problems concerning the misuse of apostrophes and 's'. *sister* gives you the genitive *sister's*. *sisters* gives you the genitive *sisters'*. Names such as *Sophocles* or *James* can have genitives with an extra 's' or without one, so both *Sophocles'* and *Sophocles's* can be acceptable.

In Latin, an example would be:

fur pecuniam amici mei abstulit

The thief stole my friend's money.

The thief stole the money of my friend.

1st declension nouns

2nd declension nouns

3rd declension nouns

4th declension nouns

5th declension nouns

The genitive of apposition

This is probably the simplest form of the genitive after the possessive. Two nouns are put next to each other (in apposition) and the second noun is in the genitive, qualifying the first one (adding more information about it).

It is good to learn the art of speaking

which in Latin would be:

bonum est artem dicendi discere.

Here *dicendi* gives you more information about *artem*.

A further example:

quantum ad festos dies ludorum celebrandos ... conceditur. (Cicero
Pro Archia 13)

The partitive genitive

This denotes the *part* of a *whole*.

He ate *half* of the cake.

Many of you want to win the lottery.

In Latin, examples include:

multae feminarum clamant

pars oppidi deletaerat

bonine an mali plus attulerit hominibus et civitatibus copia dicendi
ac summum eloquentiae stadium
Cicero *De inventione 1.1*

The genitive of description

This covers the basic formula '*x* is of *y* kind', where *y* kind is a noun and adjective combination.

He is a man of great wisdom

which in Latin would be:

est vir magnae sapientiae

This can be used in longer constructions

The slaves killed all masters of evil character.
which in Latin would be:

servi omnes dominos moris mali necaverunt.

The genitive of material

This tells you what an object is made of.

They placed the pots of iron in the sewer
which in Latin would be:

urnae ferri in cloacam posuerunt.

The subjective genitive

The subjective and objective genitive are used with nouns and adjectives that carry a sense of feeling or action, such as love, hate, anger, leader.

A subjective genitive is one where the noun expressed in the genitive is the subject of the idea which has governed the genitive.

A mother's love for her son is great.

which in Latin would be:

amor matris filii magna est.

The objective genitive

An objective genitive is one where the noun expressed in the genitive is the object of the idea which has governed the genitive.

Fear of war saves lives

which in Latin would be:

timor belli vitas servat.

The genitive with expressions of remembering and forgetting

In Latin, the defective verb *memini* takes a genitive of the thing of

which someone is mindful.

meministi laborum nostrum.

The genitive with verbs of accusing and condemning

Verbs such as *damno* or *culpo* take a genitive of the thing for which someone is being condemned.

He blamed her for her laziness.

English does not use a genitive here and so special care must be taken.

A Latin example:

feminas lacrimarum damnant.

The predicative genitive

This use of the genitive is characterised by an impersonal use of *est* followed by a genitive and an infinitive, translated as 'it is the mark/job / nature of *x* to do *y*'.

It is the sailor's job to navigate

which in Latin would be:

est nautae navigare.

Other examples:

est medici aegrotas sanare

est ducis urbem curare

This use of the genitive is also sometimes referred to as the **genitive of characteristic**.

Exercises

What kind of genitive is in each of the following sentences?

Love *of the fatherland* compels me to fight.

We wanted to buy our *friend's* house.

The first little pig built his house *of straw*, but the last little pig built his out *of bricks*.

You must pour libations *of wine* to the goddesses *of the underworld*.

It is the mark *of a professional* to turn up on time.

Further exercises

Translate the following examples into Latin and identify which type of genitive is used:

The love of war destroys humanity.

Fear of dying terrified the captives.

A mother's love is very great.

Remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

The soldiers waged war for the sake of glory.

Translate the following sentences, and identify which type of genitive is in each. Some sentences could be taken in more than one way. Give alternative translations depending on how you understand the genitive:

est custodis curare portas

vulnera militum non videmus

Hannibal visum oculi amisit

est viri pii deos colere
amor patris me adiuvat
amor patris me prohibet
est medici aegrotas sanare
est ducis urbem curare

Examples drawn from the exercises

Identify the genitive in each question, and specify what kind of genitive it is.

The number after each question indicates the exercise from which it has been drawn, so that you can look at the example in context.

1. videtis intestinam aliquam cotidie perniciem rei publicae molientem. *Exercise 7*
2. Amici medicorum, laus coquorum. *Exercise 3*
3. Nautarum gubernatores, noctis decor. *Exercise 3*
4. Surgent venti et beatae spirent almae fortunatae auras coeli fulgidas. *Exercise 5*
5. Ceterum ipsius urbis pulchritudo ac vetustas non regis modo ... *Exercise 10*

Examples drawn from Cicero

1. Ac ne quis a nobis hoc ita dici forte miretur, quod aliam quaedam in hoc facultas sit ingeni neque haec dicendi ratio aut disciplina ... *Pro Archia 2*
2. detis ... veniam ... ut ... patiamini de studiis humanitatis ac litterarum Paulo loqui liberius ... *Pro Archia 3*
3. perficiam profecto ut hunc A. Licinium ... a numero civium ... putetis asciscendum fuisse. *Pro Archia 4*

4. se ad scribendi studium contulit. *Pro Archia 4*
5. erat Italia tum plena Graecarum atrium ac disciplinarum ...
Pro Archia 5
6. hic Romae propeter tranquillitatem rei publicae non
neglegebantur. *Pro Archia 5*
7. Nihilne te nocturnum praesidium Palatii, nihil urbis vigiliae, nihil
timor populi, nihil concursus bonorum omnium, nihil hic
munitissimus habendi senatus locus, nihil horum ora vultusque
moverunt? *In Catilinam 1.I.1*
8. Catilinam, orbem terrae caede atque incendiis vastare
cupientem, nos consules preferemus?
In Catilinam 1.I.3
9. sed iam me ipse inertiae nequitiaeque condemno.
In Catilinam 2.II.4
10. tibi uni multorum civium necesse, tibi vexatio direptioque sociorum
inpunita fuit ac libera
In Catilinam 1.VII.18