

New Testament Greek Syntax

The Genitive Case

The genitive primarily functions adjectivally to limit (restrict, see Louw *Linguistic Theory*) a substantive by describing, defining or qualifying / modifying it. The genitive also sometimes functions to express the idea of separation, point of departure, source, origin (ie. the ablative use).

In the NT the adjectival use of the genitive is dominant since it is common to Hebrew construction.

1. Adjectival Genitive

A substantive genitive functioning as an emphatic adjective limiting a connecting substantive by describing, defining or qualifying it.

This is the primary, if not essential, function of the genitive in NT Greek

i) Describing

In general terms the genitive serves to limit the substantive by describing it.

a) Attributive (Quality, Hebrew)

Functioning as an attributive adjective reflecting the Semitic use of the genitive

Supplying a specific attribute, or innate quality, present in the substantive it seeks to limit

The UNJUST steward

ὁ οἰκονομὸς τῆς ἀδικίας

b) Attributed

A reversal of the usual attributive function of the genitive - possibly not so rare

The lead noun, rather than the genitive noun, functions as the attributive adjective

Often used for emphasis

we should walk in newness OF LIFE

we should walk in new LIFE

ἡμεῖς ἐν καινοτητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν

Objective genitives are sometimes better treated as an attributed genitive

ὁ ἐμπλοκή τριχῶν

the braiding OF HAIR - objective genitive

braided HAIR - attributed genitive

c) Idiomatic (aporetic)

This classification of the descriptive genitive covers the many idiomatic uses of the adjectival genitive.

The more easily defined are as follows:

ετοιμασατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου

prepare the way OF LORD

prepare the way FOR THE LORD TO TRAVEL

Movement Toward

Describing where the substantive is heading - destination, direction, purpose

Translate: supply (often) "destined for"

we were children OF (destined for) WRATH

ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς

Subordination

Describing subordination of the genitive to the substantive

Translate: replace "of" with "over"

the ruler OF [over] DEMONS

τῷ ἀρχοντι τῶν δαμονίων

Material

Describing the material out of which the substantive is made

Translate: "made out of / consisting of"

a herd (consisting) OF SWINE

αγελη χοιρων

Content

Describing the content of the substantive

Translate: "full of / containing"

το δικτυον των ιχθυων

The net (full) OF FISH

Locative

Identifying a location

απο Κανα της Γαλιλαιας

from Cana OF (which is located in) GALILEE

Identification

Defining the name or title of something, or someplace

Translate: "which is called / known as / in the region of"

to Zarepath (which is in the region) OF SIDON

εις Σαρεπατα της Σιδωνιας

Destination

οδους ζωης

paths OF (which lead to) LIFE

Producer / Product

το λελος της πιστεως

the end / outcome (which is the product) OF FAITH

Price

ωνησατο Αβρααμ τιμης αργυριου

Abraham bought OF (for a certain) AMOUNT OF SILVER

Temporal

With a word of time the genitive tends to explain what occurred at that time

you did not know the time OF VISITATION

you did not know the time **when God VISITED** you

ουκ εγνωσ τον καιρον της επισκοπιης

ii] Defining

A **genitive of definition** serves to limit a substantive by defining, or explaining it.

Sometimes classified as either **appositional**, or **epexegetic**, the differences of which are somewhat blurred.

With this genitive the connecting substantive is limited by either:

defining it (appositional),

or explaining, specifying or clarifying it (epexegetic).

Translation: = "namely, that is, which is, consisting of, ..."

The sign OF CIRCUMCISION

The sign **namely / that is / which is** CIRCUMCISION

σημειον περιτομης

he is the head of the body OF THE CHURCH

he is the head of the body **which is / consists of** THE CHURCH

αυτος εστιν η κεφαλη του σωματος, της εκκλησιας

iii] Qualifying / Modifying

Here the genitive serves to qualify / modify and thus limit the substantive

a) Possessive

Identifying possession of

a dependent status or

a derivative characteristic - *characterized by*
all things are YOURS
παντα υμων εστιν

b) Relational

Describing some marital, genital or social relationship with the substantive
The person doing the relating must be supplied
Simon (son) OF JOHN
Σιμων Ιωαννου

c) Partitive / Wholative

Identifying the whole of which the substantive is a part of, or all of
Often found after verbs "to taste / touch / partake" as only part of the object is acted on by the verb
εκ + gen. produces a similar partitive translation
Often following *τις, εκαστος*
the poor OF THE SAINTS
the poor forming a particular part of the saints
τους πτωχους των αγιων

d) Connective

Two words in a vague general genitive relationship
Best translated with a hyphen
from WORKS OF LAW = from LAW-WORKS
εξ εργαων νομου

2. Ablative Genitive**

Indicating separation, either static or movement from, or comparison with
Koine Greek was in the process of replacing this use by the addition of a preposition + gen.

i] Separation

Identifying separation of the genitive substantive from a verb or noun
Translate: supply "out of, away from, from"
Koine replacement: *απο, εκ, προ* + gen.
he has ceased FROM [doing] SIN
πεπαυται αμαρτιας

ii] Comparison

Identifying comparison, by drawing a comparison with something else
Usually after a comparative adjective
Translate: supply "than"
you are of more value THAN MANY SPARROWS
πολλων σιρουθιων διαφερετε

iii] Source (Origin / Author, Agent)

Identifying the source from which the noun originates
Translate: supply "out of, derived from, dependent on"
Koine replacement: *απο, εκ, κατα, παρα* + gen.
you are a letter FROM CHRIST
εστε επιστολη Χριστου
The righteousness OF FAITH (that springs from faith?)
δικαιοσυνη πιστεως

3. Verbal Genitive

The genitive substantive may sometimes function as the subject or object of a noun of action (a verbal noun).

This construction now has its critics such that weight should be given to an adjectival / limiting use of the genitive.

Some important interpretations rest on this classification, particularly when the classification is objective, eg.:

δια πιστεως Ιησου Χριστου, Gal.2:16

Objective genitive = a person is justified not by works of the law but through faith IN JESUS CHRIST

Adjectival genitive = a person is justified not by works of the law but by the faithfulness OF JESUS

CHRIST

Examples of verbal nouns: οργη, αγαπη, δεισις....

i] Subjective genitive (Active genitive)

Where the genitive substantive produces the action implied by the verbal noun

Often this genitive can be classified as adjectival, possessive.

τον πλαιον ανθρωπον συν ταις πραξεσιν αυτου

you have put off the old self with ITS practices / the practices OF IT

Possessive: you have put off the old self with the practices THAT CHARACTERIZED IT

Subjective: you have put off the old self with the practices THAT EXPRESSED IT

ii] Objective genitive

Where the genitive substantive receives the action implied by the verbal noun

Usually expressed by *about / for / concerning / toward* placed before the genitive

the report OF HIM

the report CONCERNING / ABOUT HIM

η ακοη αυτου

Consider attributed or source/origin instead

because of the fear OF THE JEWS (stemming from the activities of the Jews)

δια τον φοβον των Ιουδαιων

* Sometimes both ideas are present = Plenary or Full Genitive.

Moulton argues that the interpretation of these genitives is more a matter of exegesis than grammar, the final arbiter being the context

the love OF CHRIST constrains us

η γαρ αγαπη Χριστου συνεχει ημας

Subjective: Christ produces the action of the verbal noun "love"

the love which Christ feels for us, cf. Gal.2:20

Objective: Christ receives the action of the verbal noun "love"

the love which we feel for Christ

An adjectival genitive, possessive / relational, may better explain the verse

The love which belongs to / characterizes the person of Christ constrains us

4. Adverbial Genitive

A genitive substantive that functions in the same way as an adverb, as such it modifies a verb rather than a substantive

i] Time

Expressing the kind of time within which an action takes place, or one kind of time as opposed to another.

Translate: supply "during, at, within"

Ablative form, therefore being replaced by δια, επι, αχρι, εως + gen.

I fast twice DURING THE WEEK

νηστευω δις του σαββατου

ii] Measure (Quantity, Value or Price)

Expressing how much or how far. *Rare*

Translate: supply "for"

you were bought FOR A PRICE

ηγορασθητε τιμης

iii] Space (Place)

Expressing the kind of place, one place as opposed to another place, rather than just locative (dative). *Rare*

Translate: supply "in, at, through"

Redundant, being replaced by **δια, επι, κατα** + numerous adverbial prepositions

He was about to pass THROUGH THAT WAY

εκεινης ημελλεν διερχεσθαι

iv] Means (Instrumental)

Expressing the means by which an action is accomplished. *Rare*

Translate: supply "by, by means of"

death BY [means of] A CROSS

θανατου δε σταυρου

v] Agency

Identifying the person (agent) by whom the action is accomplished. *Rare*

Translate: supply "by"

they shall all be taught BY GOD

εσονται παντες διδακτοι θεου

vi] Reference (Respect)

Defining the frame of reference of an adjective or substantive

Translate: supply "with reference to, with respect to, about, concerning"

Prepositions replacing this form: **περι, υπερ**

The dative of reference is a more common form

a heart of evil WITH REFERENCE TO UNBELIEF

καρδια πονηρα απιστιας

vii] Association

Identifying with whom the noun associates

Translate: supply "with"

Preposition replacing this form: **μετα**

The Instrumental Dative is a more common form, esp. **συν** + dat.

you are fellow-citizens WITH THE SAINTS

εστε συμπολιται των αγιων

viii] Result

cf. BDF 166.

5. A genitive after certain verbs and adjectives

Genitives that don't properly fit the above categories, known as "genitives after certain words"

i] A genitive direct object after certain verbs

Verbs that take a genitive direct object instead of an accusative:

a) Partitive, separation; where the object is viewed in part, or separate from:

touch, share, seize, hold, take from, taste, eat ("partake") ...

he touched his TONGUE

ηψατο της γλωσσης αυτου

b) Full, or filling, full of

c) Perception, sensation: hearing, smelling

For example, the verb **ακουω** will often take a genitive of direct object.

hearing THE VOICE but seeing no one

ακουντες μεν της φωνης μηδενα δε θεωρουντες

d) A verb of want - emotion, volition: desire, bear with, reach, attain, obtain

he desires A NOBLE WORK

καλου εργου επιθυμει

e) Ruling, excelling, suppressing, accusing

the kings of the Gentiles lord it OVER THEM

οι βασιλεις των εθνων κυριευουσιν αυτων

f) Remember, forget

ii] A genitive complement after certain adjectives, nouns and adverbs

Adjectives, sometimes nouns and adverbs, take a genitive:

a) Fullness or want, worthiness or unworthiness, participation
full OF GRACE and TRUTH

πληρης χαριτος και αληθειας

b) Comparison

you will see greater things THAN THESE

μειζω τουτων οψη

6. Genitive Absolute

Genitive noun or pronoun + anarthrous gen. part. standing by themselves at the beginning of a sentence

Usually translated as a temporal clause but sometimes other adverbial clauses will suit

Dative and accusative forms. *Rare*

WHILE THEY WERE SPEAKING these things

τουτα δε αυτων λαλουντων