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The genitive network:

The genitive case is the most frequent case, has the most prepositions, forms chains, and has the most complex meaning.

**Prologue**

Let’s start by looking at an example:

Фидель Кастро на пятом съезде своей компартии говорил без умолку шесть часов и сорок три минуты, что достоин рекордов Книги Гиннесса.

[Fidel Castro-NOM at fifth congress-LOC own communist-party-GEN spoke without pause-GEN six-ACC hours-GEN and forty-three minutes-ACC, that worthy records-GEN Book-GEN Guinness-GEN.]

At the fifth congress of *his communist party*, Fidel Castro spoke without *pause* for six *hours* and forty-three minutes, an accomplishment worthy of *the Guinness Book of Records*.

Here we see six uses of the genitive case in a single sentence, one that is not even particularly long or unusual. If there were an entry for Russian case use in the Guinness Book of World Records, the genitive case would walk off with multiple honors, among them:

- The genitive is the most used case in Russian. The likelihood of finding sentences with six uses of any other case is relatively small.
- The genitive is used with over one hundred prepositions (about 40 simple prepositions and 70 complex ones), vastly more than all the other cases combined.
- The genitive is the only case that forms chains of consecutive uses, as in our example above: достоин рекордов Книги Гиннесса [worthy records-GEN Book-GEN Guinness-GEN], literally ‘worthy of the records of the Book of Guinness’.
- The genitive is probably the most complex case in Russian, and the basic idea of the genitive is perhaps the hardest to grasp.
These might look like formidable hurdles, but our strategy is to tackle the last item on the list, the meaning of the genitive. After that, all the other “problems” will become opportunities for easy success.

The uses of the genitive will be described in terms of four categories: genitive: a source, genitive: a goal, genitive: a whole, and genitive: a reference. The four labels used here hint at both what the basic meaning of the genitive is and why it is so hard to make sense of it. The genitive is by nature an elusive beast, a sort of “back-seat driver” that is always handing off the responsibility of focusing attention to something else. When we say that something comes from a source, we generally aren’t as interested in the source as we are in the something that comes from it. The same goes for goals; while a goal is important, what we really care about is the person or thing that is headed for it. In the genitive: a whole use, there is always another item that plays the role of the “part”, and of course when we are talking about something that is part of a whole, we are focusing our attention on the part more than on the whole. A reference point is something that we use to locate something else, and in its genitive: a reference use, the genitive serves as a mental address for other things. Rather than turning focus to the item it marks, the genitive deflects our focus away from it. It is this habit of retreating into the background that makes the genitive so hard to pin down. Passing the buck, by the way, also makes the chaining of genitives possible, allowing focus to bounce from one item to the next.

Looking at the labels, however, it is at first hard to understand what they have in common. After all, a source and a goal seem to be opposites, and both involve movement, whereas whole and reference are static. If we compare the diagrams of the four uses, we see that the genitive: a goal is really the same as the genitive: a source, just run in reverse, and furthermore the genitive: a whole and genitive: a reference are simply the two endpoints of genitive: a source. More abstractly, we could say that all of the diagrams support the following definition:

The genitive is a backgrounded item (big circle) that yields focus of attention to something else (small circle) which exists or maneuvers in its proximity.

In order to make sense of this definition we will have to examine the many faces of the genitive in action.

**Genitive: A Source 1—Going to > coming from**

The genitive: a source meaning is always triggered by a preposition or word indicating removal or withdrawal from the genitive item. All three of the prepositions particularly important in expressing this meaning are often translated as ‘from’: πριν, στοιχεῖον, and στάθμος. These three prepositions reverse the direction of motion described by the prepositions β, η, κ in their meaning ‘to, toward’. Here again is the table comparing β, η, κ, this time adding the reverse direction:
GOING TO

some non-human destinations require  в + ACC

Дочь пошла  в  школу.  
[Daughter-NOM went  in  school-ACC.] 
My daughter went  to  school.

some non-human destinations require  на + ACC

Дочь пошла  на  почту. 
[Daughter-NOM went on  post-office-ACC.] 
My daughter went  to  the post-office.

all human destinations require  к + DAT

Дочь пошла  к  врачу.  
[Daughter-NOM went  to  doctor-DAT.] 
My daughter went  to  the doctor.

COMING FROM

non-human destinations that require  в + ACC use из + GEN when they are sources

Дочь пришла  из  школы. 
[Daughter-NOM came from  school-GEN.] 
My daughter came (home)  from  school.

non-human destinations that require  на + ACC use с + GEN when they are sources

Дочь пришла  с  почты.  
[Daughter-NOM came from  post-office-GEN.] 
My daughter came (home)  from  the post-office.

all human destinations require  к + DAT and use от + GEN when they are sources

Дочь пришла  от  врача.  
[Daughter-NOM came from  doctor-GEN.] 
My daughter came (home)  from  the doctor.

Genitive: a source 2—из ‘from’

Here are some examples of the use of из to indicate a container or location from which something is removed:

Наше стульях и кровати лежали вещи, вынутые из сундука. 
[On chairs-LOC and bed-LOC lay things-NOM, taken-NOM from trunk-GEN.] 
On the chairs and bed lay things that had been taken out of the trunk.

Из сараи выбежал мальчик. 
[From barn-GEN ran-out boy-NOM.] 
A boy ran out of the barn.
The Genitive Case

Он археолог, недавно вернулся из Якутии.
[He-NOM archeologist-NOM, recently returned from Yakutia-GEN.]
He’s an archeologist, and he’s recently returned from Yakutia.

Из can also be used metaphorically to indicate abstract objects and refer to domains other than space. In the first of these two examples Hitchcock’s films are the source of horrors, and in the second charity (shown by a very self-important hairdresser) is the source (and thereby the motive) for giving the person a seat in the beauty parlor. Note the use of English from and out of in these examples; the metaphorical extension of the source concept is something we share with Russian.

Иногда Вадик зарисовывал свои сны, похожие на ужасы из фильмов Хичкока.
[Sometimes Vadik-NOM drew his dreams-ACC, similar-ACC on horrors-ACC from films-GEN Hitchcock-GEN.]
Sometimes Vadik drew pictures of his dreams, similar to horrors from Hitchcock’s films.

Я понимаю, что посажена в кресло из милости и вообще по сравнению с парикмахершей ничего не стою.
[I-NOM understand, that seated-NOM to chair-ACC from charity-GEN and in-general along comparison-DAT with hairdresser-INST nothing-GEN not be-worth.]
I understand that I have been given a seat out of charity and that in general in comparison with the hairdresser I am worthless.

Из appears in numerous fixed phrases. Perhaps the two most common ones are исходить из ‘proceed from; base one’s assumptions on’ and один из ‘one of [a group of things]’. Here is an example for each of these uses:

Исходя из прошлого опыта, дага́дываемся, что ...
[Proceeding from past experience-GEN, guess, that...]
Based on past experience, I guess that...

Одн из часто встречающихся мотивов его произведений — сон.
[One-NOM from frequently encountered motifs-GEN his works-GEN — sleep-NOM.]
One of the frequently encountered motifs of his work is sleep.

Из forms two secondary prepositions, both of which can be used in concrete and metaphorical contexts. Из-за, literally means ‘from beyond’. The first example below illustrates a concrete use, из-за рубежа [from-beyond border-GEN] ‘from abroad’, whereas the second is metaphorical, indicating a cause:

У этой фирмы тоже есть ресурсы из-за рубежа.
[By this firm-GEN also are resources-NOM from-beyond border-GEN.]
This firm also has resources from abroad.
Время от времени она переставала краситься, из-за хандры, или из-за того, что пропадала краска, или лень было ехать в магазин.
[Time-NOM from time-GEN she-NOM stopped dye from-beyond depression-GEN, or from-beyond that-GEN, that lost dye-NOM, or laziness-NOM was ride to store-ACC.] From time to time she would stop dyeing her hair, whether from depression, or from the fact that there was no dye in the store, or because she just felt too lazy to go to the store.

Из-под is the other complex preposition, literally ‘from beneath’. The first example is of a concrete use, whereas the second is idiomatic:

Гла́вную опóру выбиба́ют у негó из-под ног.
[Main support-ACC knock-out by him-GEN from-beneath feet-GEN.] They are knocking his main support out from under his feet.

Сковоро́да свали́лась на буты́лки из-под ке́фира, кото́рые стоя́т вóзле плита́.
[Frying pan-NOM fell on bottles-ACC from-beneath kefir-GEN, which-NOM stand next-to burner-GEN.] The frying pan fell onto the kefir bottles that are next to the burner.

**Genitive: a source 3—с ‘from’**

Just as из takes us on the path reversing the direction of в + ACC for something that is conceived of as a container, so с takes us on the path reversing на + ACC for something that is conceived of as a surface. The bee house was on the tree, the pinecone was on the ground, and the friends were at the language department, all using на for locations, and consequently с for removal from these locations.

Он снял пчёлный до́мик с дёрева.
[He-NOM removed bee house-ACC from tree-GEN.] He removed the bee house from the tree.

Она́ подняла́ с земли́ ши́шку.
[She-NOM picked-up from ground-GEN pinecone-ACC.] She picked up a pinecone from the ground.

При́ятели с фи́лфа́ка не внуша́ли довéрия.
[Friends-NOM from language-department-GEN not inspired confidence-GEN.] Our friends from the language department did not inspire confidence.

Although the genitive: a source preposition that is usually used with human beings is от, we do occasionally see human beings with с, particularly when they are viewed as a source of money, as in the common phrase Ско́лько с меня́? [How much from me-GEN?] ‘How much do I owe you?’, or the following example:
The government does not collect a tax from prostitutes.

With time expressions, c can be used to indicate the time when something begins. Common examples are months and ages, as well as the fixed expression c mex nop [from those times-GEN] ‘from *that time on*’. Here are three examples to illustrate:

Raisa started gluing pill boxes *when she was five years old*.

From *January through May* you will be in olympic form.

I have dreamed about literature since *childhood*.

Like any other preposition, c has its metaphorical uses. Here are a couple of examples to whet your appetite, one involving the source serving as a motive (the hangover causing the gloomy mood), and the other referring to an abstract numerical realm:

You keep showing up when Dudko is gloomy because *he’s got a hangover*.

Thank God we weren’t starting from *zero*.

**GENITIVE: A SOURCE 4—от ‘from’**

As our table above indicates, when a human being serves as GENITIVE: A SOURCE, you can usually expect to see the preposition ot. The following example serves to illustrate both the use of ot with human sources and the fact that ot is frequently used with non-human sources as well:

From his face I understood how glad he would be to go south, away from the yelling, away from his mother-in-law, and away from his wife.
Whenever location is expressed in terms of y ‘by’ + GEN (see below under genitive: a reference), removal from that place is expressed with ot. In Russian a person can stand y окна [by window-GEN] ‘by the window’, and removal from this position is achieved by ot:

Почти четыре шага можно сделать в прогулке от окна до дверей.
[Almost four steps-ACC possible do in walk-LOC from window-GEN to door-GEN.]
One can take almost four steps in walking from the window to the door.

The use of ot with expressions of time is not particularly common, but here is an example:

В ответном письме Лутокhinu от первого мая 1926 г. Горький дал более развёрнутую оценку поэзии Цветаевой.
[In answer letter-LOC Lutokhin-DAT from first-GEN May-GEN 1926-GEN Gorky-NOM gave more extensive evaluation-ACC poetry-GEN Tsvetaeva-GEN.]
In his letter of response written to Lutokhin on the first of May, 1926, Gorky gave a more extensive evaluation of Tsvetaeva’s poetry.

In Russian dependence is expressed using the verb зави́ться (or the noun зави́симость or the adjective зави́симый) ot + GEN, as in this example:

Западноевропейские государства смогут уменьшить свою зависимость от стран-членов ОПЕК.
[West-European states-NOM can reduce their dependence-ACC from countries-members-GEN OPEC-GEN.]
West European states can reduce their dependence on the OPEC member-countries.

Just like из and с, ot can identify a metaphorical source in terms of a cause. In the case of ot, this is usually the cause of illness or death, although other causes can also come into play:

Её муж умер от разры́ва сердца.
[Her husband-NOM died from rupture-GEN heart-GEN.]
Her husband died from a heart attack.

Утверждают, что Микеланджело также страда́л от безумных мыслей.
[Claim, that Michelangelo-NOM also suffered from crazy thoughts-GEN.]
They claim that Michelangelo also suffered from crazy thoughts.

От захваченного за окном фона́ря на полу коса́ закры́ка тень рáмы.
[From lighted-GEN beyond window-INST lamp-GEN on floor slanting flickering shadow-NOM windowframe-GEN.]
From the lighted lamp outside the window there is a slanting, flickering shadow of the windowframe on the floor.
**GENITIVE: A SOURCE 5—Withdrawal**

In addition to prepositions, some other words trigger the use of **GENITIVE: A SOURCE**. Like the prepositions, they all indicate motions of withdrawal from the genitive item, whether due to fear or disgust. Here is a table of the words you are likely to encounter, followed by a few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>'fear'</th>
<th>'shy away from'</th>
<th>'be shy'</th>
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<td>бояться</td>
<td>дичьться</td>
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<tr>
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<td>гнушаться/погнушаться</td>
<td>'be frightened'</td>
<td>стыдиться/постыдиться</td>
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<td>'avoid'</td>
<td>избегать/избежать</td>
<td>'putаться/испутаться</td>
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<tr>
<td>'beware'</td>
<td>остерегаться/остеречься</td>
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<tr>
<td>'shun, avoid'</td>
<td>сторониться/посторониться</td>
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<tr>
<td>'be ashamed'</td>
<td>стыдиться/постыдиться</td>
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<tr>
<td>'shun, stand aloof'</td>
<td>чуждаться</td>
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[She yielded pleasures-DAT, judiciously avoiding unpleasant-things-GEN.]
She abandoned herself to pleasure, judiciously avoiding *unpleasant things*.

[They-NOM completely not were-shy presence-GEN people-GEN.]
They were not the least bit shy *of the presence* of people.

They-NOM not commanded English language-INST and were-ashamed this-GEN.
They did not know English and were ashamed *of this*.

**GENITIVE: A GOAL 1—до ‘to’**

As its name suggests, **GENITIVE: A GOAL** identifies an item that is approached. Like **GENITIVE: A SOURCE**, **GENITIVE: A GOAL** is always triggered by a preposition or other word. By far the most common is the preposition до ‘to’, which can be applied to the domains of space and time, as well as to metaphorical realms. Here are two examples of how до defines an approach in terms of physical space:

An item (small circle) reaches a GENITIVE:: A GOAL (circle labeled G)
To tram-GEN I-NOM went successfully, carrying suitcase-ACC that in right-LOC, that in left hand-LOC.
I made my way to the tram successfully, carrying my suitcase first in my right hand and then in my left.

Steps-NOM my train-car-GEN not go to ground-GEN.
The steps of my train car do not reach the ground.

When used with time expressions, до can mean ‘before’, as in до войны [before war-GEN] ‘before the war’, but more frequently has a meaning very similar to English ‘until’, as in до свидания [until seeing-GEN] ‘goodbye (lit: until we see each other again)’. Here are a couple of examples to show how this works in sentences:

После тридцати шести лет разлуки, отец и сын беседовали до утра.
[After thirty-six years-gen separation-gen, father-NOM and son-NOM talked until morning-gen.] After being separated for thirty-six years, father and son talked until morning.

Выйкупавшись в реке, он ложился на траву и спал до обеда.
[Having-swum in river-LOC, he-NOM lay-down on grass-ACC and slept until lunch-GEN.] After taking a swim in the river, he would lie on the grass and sleep until lunch.

In relation to points in time, до performs the inverse of с, treating the point as a surface. Thus, as in the following example, one stretches a time line (of devotion to children’s literature) from one point (the end of the twenties) to another (the end of life) by using с and до in tandem:

Детская литература с конца 20-х годов до конца жизни была его лицом, его визитной карточкой, именем наконец.
[Children’s literature-NOM from end-GEN 20’s years-gen until end-GEN life-gen was his face-INST, his calling card-INST, name-INST in-the-end.] From the late twenties until the end of his life, children’s literature was his face, his calling card, his name really.

This pairing of с and до motivates the use of до with the fixed expression до cux/mex nop [up-to this/that time-gen] ‘until this/that time’:

Очевидно, до cux nop я казался ей воплощением здоровьем и навынством.
[Obviously, until this time-gen I-NOM seemed her-DAT incarnation-INST health-gen and naivete-gen.] Obviously until then I had seemed to her to be health and naivete incarnate.
Metaphorically до can describe movement into various states, such as the politico-economic states in the first example below, and states of mind in the second one:

Не важно, что режим довёл страну до международной изоляции, до массового исхода интересов, до безденья.
[Not important, that regime-NOM led country-ACC to international isolation-GEN, to mass exodus-GEN interests-GEN, to pennilessness-GEN.]  
It's not important that the regime led the country to a state of international isolation, mass exodus of interests, and pennilessness.

Гогена мутили мания преследования и депрессия, доведя его до мыслей о самоубийстве.
[ Gaugin-ACC tormented mania-NOM persecution-GEN and depression-NOM, leading him-ACC to thoughts-GEN about suicide-LOC.]  
Gaugin was tormented by persecution mania and depression, leading him to thoughts of suicide.

Similar to the time line illustrated above, до can be used to reach points on all kinds of scales, be they numerical or otherwise (extent of persecution, spectrum of painting styles), as in the following examples:

До двухсот тысяч туристов ежегодно приезжают сюда полюбоваться на животных, живущих в естественных условиях.
[Up-to two hundred thousand tourists-GEN yearly come here admire on animals-ACC, living-ACC in natural conditions-LOC.]  
Up to two hundred thousand tourists a year come here to admire the animals living in natural conditions.

Но она решила преследовать своего мужа до конца.
[But she-NOM decided persecute own husband-ACC to end-GEN.]  
But she decided to persecute her husband to the end.

Картинь от сверхреализма до демонизма рождаются там.
[Pictures-NOM from super-realism-GEN to demonism-GEN are-born there.]  
Pictures from super-realism to demonism are born there.

До also participates in an idiomatic phrase used to indicate that someone is not in the mood for something, namely DAT + не до + GEN:

Но Пушкину было не до детей.
[But Pushkin-DAT was not up-to children-GEN.]  
But Pushkin wasn’t in the mood for children.
**GENITIVE: A GOAL** 2—для ‘for’ and пр́́тив ‘against’

In the domain of purpose, the approach involved in GENITIVE: A GOAL makes a gesture toward the genitive item, usually offering it some kind of benefit, and this is done with the preposition для ‘for’. Here are some examples to illustrate:

Я пишу́ не для слави́стов. Я пишу́ для норма́льных люде́й.
[I-NOM write not for Slavists-GEN. I-NOM write for normal people-GEN.]
I don’t write for Slavists. I write for normal people.

Санатори́й был закры́того ты́па, для высокопоста́вленных люде́й.
[Sanatorium-NOM was closed type-GEN, for highly-placed people-GEN.]
It was an exclusive sanatorium, for highly-placed people.

Придётся обращёнаться за помощью к друзья́м и знако́мым для решёния нёкоторых пробле́м.
[Is-necessary turn for help-INST to friends-DAT and acquaintances-DAT for solution-GEN certain problems-GEN.]
It is necessary to turn to friends and acquaintances in order to solve certain problems.

Similar to для is the preposition ра́ди, usually translated as ‘for the sake of’:

Что с вами? Я же здесь ра́ди вас.
[What-NOM with you-INST? I-NOM after-all here for-the-sake-of you-GEN.]  
What’s with you? After all, I’m here for your sake.

An approach in the immediate vicinity of some person or thing can also be an act of aggression directed against GENITIVE: A GOAL, and this is expressed by means of the preposition пр́́тив ‘against’:

Когда́ была кампания пр́́тив взяточничества, Йо́рге́ рисовал красноро́жего взяточника.
[When was campaign-NOM against bribery-GEN, Igor-NOM drew red-faced bribe-taker-ACC.]
When there was a campaign against bribery, Igor drew a picture of a red-faced bribe-taker.

О́н ищут сре́дства не только пр́́тив ви́руса, но и для упроще́ния защи́тных функций на́шего орга́низма.
[They-NOM seek means-GEN not only against virus-GEN, but also for simplification-GEN defense functions-GEN our body-GEN.]  
They are looking for something not only to fight the virus, but also to simplify our body’s defense functions.
Less frequently против can be interpreted concretely as mere location opposite rather than actual opposition, as in this example:

Против корпуса жгли костёр, навёрное, сжигали ненужный хлам.
[Opposite building-GEN burned bonfire-ACC, probably, burned unneeded trash-ACC.]
Opposite the building they burned a bonfire; they were probably burning unneeded trash.

Finally, жаль/жалко ‘regret, pity’ that can be used in impersonal expressions with the genitive (or accusative):

Я люблю детские голоса, и мне при этом бывает невыразимо жаль своей уходящей жизни.
[I-NOM love children’s voices-ACC, and me-DAT at this-LOC is inexpressibly regret own slipping-away life-GEN.]
I love children’s voices, and when I hear them I feel inexpressible regret for my own life which is slipping away.

**GENITIVE: A GOAL 3—Actual approach**

There are two groups of words associated with genitive: a goal. For the first group, the goal is actual, and it is touched, held to, acquired, desired, or deserved, in which case the use of the genitive case is obligatory. For the second group, the goal is potential, and it is sought, expected, or hoped for, in which case the use of the genitive is optional. We will look at each group in turn.

**Words meaning ‘get’, ‘approach’, ‘desire’ associated with GENITIVE:: A GOAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘hold to’</th>
<th>‘worthy’</th>
<th>‘touch; concern’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>держаться</td>
<td>достойный</td>
<td>касаться/коснуться</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘get, obtain’</th>
<th>‘desire, wish’</th>
<th>‘listen to; obey’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>добиваться/добиться</td>
<td>желать/пожелать</td>
<td>слушаться/послушаться</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘attain, reach’</th>
<th>‘deserve, merit’</th>
<th>‘be worth, deserve’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>достигать/достигнуть/достичь</td>
<td>заслуживать/заслужить</td>
<td>стоять</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘receive, be awarded’</th>
<th>‘удостоиться/удостоить’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Here are a few examples to whet your appetite:

Как вы достигли такого нравственного совершенства?
[How you-NOM attained such moral perfection-GEN?]
How have you attained such moral perfection?

Он встаёт, отходит ко окну. Кажется, я добилась своего — ему неприятно.
[He-NOM gets-up, walks to window-DAT. Seems, I-NOM got own-GEN — him-DAT unpleasant.]
He gets up and goes to the window. It seems that I have gotten what I want — he is uncomfortable.

Задача литературы состоит в том, чтобы показывать всех, кого обычно презирают, людьми, достойными уважения и жалости.

[Task-NOM literature-GEN consists in that-LOC, in-order show everyone-ACC, who-ACC usually despise, people-INST, worthy-INST respect-GEN and pity-GEN.]
Literature’s task consists of depicting all people who are despised as people who are worthy of respect and pity.

As the table suggests, касаться/коснуться can indicate both physical ‘touching’, as in the first example below, as well as touching in the intellectual realm, usually rendered in English as ‘concerning’, as in the second example:

Они как будто танцевали как-то медленный танец в красной комнате и не касались пола.
[They-NOM as if danced some slow dance-ACC in red room-LOC and not touched floor-GEN.]
It was as if they were dancing some slow dance in a red room and were not touching the floor.

Другие протоколы касаются сотрудничества в области ядерной энергетики и безопасности.
[Other protocols-NOM touch collaboration-GEN in area-LOC nuclear energy-GEN and security-GEN.]
Other protocols concern collaboration in the area of nuclear energy and security.

The verb жела́ть/пожела́ть ‘wish’ is an essential but often invisible ingredient in many salutations. A complete sentence such as Я жела́ю вам успеха [I-NOM wish you-DAT success-GEN] ‘I wish you success’ shows the underlying structure of these expressions. Usually this formula is abbreviated, leaving only the thing being wished in the genitive case. Here are some common phrases that are built this way:

Все го́доро́го/лукшиего! [All good/best-GEN!] All the best!
Приятного аппетита! [Pleasant appetite-GEN!] Bon appetit!
Спокойной но́чи! [Calm night-GEN!] Good night!
Счастливого пути! [Happy trip-GEN!] Have a good trip!

**Genitive: A Goal 4—Hypothetical approach**

The difference between the words that require the **Genitive: A Goal**, and those that can use either the genitive or the accusative boils down to a difference between the status of the item that might be marked with the genitive. The verbs that require the genitive also tend to
require that their object be something we know exists or can identify. You cannot attain a non-existent goal, nor can you touch something that isn’t there. But you can look for something or wait for something regardless of whether the object of your quest exists. Snow White sang “Some day my prince will come” before she ever met him, and indeed before she even knew that such a person really existed. She was waiting for a dream, and got lucky. The words that can take either the genitive or the accusative leave the door open for this possibility. When the item being sought is relatively non-specific, the genitive is used; when a specific item is sought, it will appear in the accusative.

The following table should give you some insight into how these verbs are used. Boris is a dreamer like Snow White; he knows that he wants some things, but doesn’t necessarily know exactly what they are. His brother Gleb is after specific items he can positively identify.

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Comparison of GENITIVE:: A GOAL and ACCUSATIVE: A DESTINATION

Of course, real examples aren’t ordinarily so clear-cut. Here are a couple to illustrate:

Чего я жду каждый раз, оказываясь в незнакомом месте?
[What-GEN I-NOM wait every time-ACC, finding-self in unfamiliar place-LOC?]  
*What is it that* I wait for every time I find myself in an unfamiliar place?

Жизнь, которую мы вели, требовала значительных расходов.
[Life-NOM, which-ACC we-NOM led, required considerable expenditures-GEN.]  
The life we led required *considerable expenditures*. 
**GENITIVE: A WHOLE 1—‘Of’, possession, and color**

In this submeaning the genitive is a whole of which something else is a part. This accounts for all the uses of the genitive that can be translated as ‘of’, as well as numerical quantifications indicating amounts of things.

By far the most common use of the genitive is what we call its “bare case” usage, where it is not triggered by any other word. In this pristine state the genitive can indicate possessors, wholes (in relation to parts), and other kinds of ‘having’ relationships that can motivate a meaning of ‘of’.

Perhaps the most basic use of **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** is to identify wholes that parts belong to. In the physical realm we have parts of discrete objects (floors of buildings), as in the first example below. More abstractly one could say that realities are parts of the world, as in the second example. In the domain of time, hours are parts of the morning, day, evening, or night, motivating the use of утро [morning-GEN] ‘in the morning’, днём [day-GEN] ‘in the afternoon’, вёчером [evening-GEN] ‘in the evening’, and ночи [night-GEN] ‘in the night’, as illustrated in the third example.

Мы занимаем целый этаж гигантского небоскрёба “Корвет.”
[We-NOM occupy whole floor-ACC giant skyscraper-GEN “Corvette”.
We occupy a whole floor **of the giant** Corvette skyscraper.

Давайте трезво взглянем на реалии современного мира.
[Let’s soberly glance on realities-ACC modern world-GEN.
Let’s take a sober look at the realities **of the modern world**.

В семь часов вёрчера она стояла возле его дома.
[In seven-ACC hours-GEN evening-GEN she-NOM stood next-to his house-GEN.
At seven o’clock **in the evening** she was standing next to his house.

Since a part belongs to a whole, it can also be thought of as a possession of the whole, and **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** is often used for this meaning, translatable into English with either the possessive form in ‘s, or with of, as in these examples:

Не повторяйте ошибку президента.
[Not repeat error-ACC president-GEN.
Don’t repeat **the president**’s error.

Я вообще люблю участвовать в жизни других людей: сватать, советовать, лечить.
[I-NOM in-general love participate in life-LOC other people-GEN: do-match-making, advise, heal.
In general I love to participate in **other people**’s lives/in the life **of other people** match-making, advising, and healing.
The second use of the genitive in last example above, literally translatable as ‘the region of eternal frost’, demonstrates another meaning of ‘of’, namely belonging to a category, being of a type. Here are some examples:

Неда́ром я испы́тывал чу́вство стра́ха.
[Not-without-reason I-NOM experienced feeling-ACC fear-GEN.] It is not without reason that I experienced a feeling of fear.

Наде́юсь, тывы́раesteць человéком большо́й душе́й.
[Hope, you-NOM grow-up person-INST big soul-GEN.] I hope that you grow up to be a person with a big soul.

Бы́л зáпах дорогóго оде́колона в лёфте.
[Was smell-NOM expensive eau-de-cologne-GEN in elevator-LOC.] There was the smell of expensive eau-de-cologne in the elevator.

Russian characteristically uses the genitive: A WHOLE to describe colors of objects, using the logic of the English phrase a horse of a different color:

Он носи́л галстук бéлого цвéта.
[He-NOM wore tie-ACC white color-GEN.] He wore a white tie.

**GENITIVE: A WHOLE 2—Events, idioms, and chains**

The items that participate in an event (subject, object, action) are related to each other; in English this relationship is expressed by of, and in Russian by the genitive: A WHOLE. In this first example, the event is a man is planning to publish some books. This event links the publication to the books:

Он плани́ровал изда́ние съедóбных дèтских кни́г.
[He-NOM planned publication-ACC edible children’s books-GEN.] He planned the publication of edible children’s books.

In this next example the event is unofficial literature exists, with the entailment that existence is an attribute of unofficial literature:

Я ужé тогда́ знал о существо́вании неофициáльной литерату́ры.
[I-NOM already then knew about existence-LOC unofficial literature-GEN.] At that time I already knew about the existence of unofficial literature.
The event *mentally ill people have produced creations* likewise links the creations to the people:

Всё большие хосёев музеёв, галереи и критиков готовы рассматривать творения психически больных людей как искусство.

[All-NOM more proprietors-GEN museums-GEN, galleries-GEN and critics-GEN ready-NOM consider creations-ACC mentally ill people-GEN as art-ACC.]

More and more proprietors of museums and galleries, as well as critics, are ready to consider the creations of mentally ill people as art.

The bare use of **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** appears in some idiomatic expressions, such as что [what-GEN] 'why', все что [all-GEN] 'in all, altogether, just, only', своё рода [own type-GEN] 'in its own way, all to itself', and что ново/интересного, etc. [what-NOM new/interesting, etc.-GEN] 'what's/is anything new/interesting', etc., as illustrated in the following examples (the first of which laments the dangers of narcotics):

Смерть ко́сит именно их, молодых и здоровых, все что лишь раз попробовавших забыться и уже непосо́бных жить без этого забыться.

[Death-NOM mows precisely them-ACC, young-ACC and healthy-ACC, all-GEN only time-ACC tried-ACC forget-self and already incapable-ACC live without this oblivion-GEN.]

They are precisely the ones that death mows down, the young and the healthy, who tried just once to forget their worries and were no longer capable of living without that oblivion.

Бо́кс, это, в общем-то, своё рода искусство.

[Boxing-NOM, that-NOM, in general-LOC, own type-GEN art-NOM.]

Boxing is actually an art all to itself.

Кого интересуют признания литературного неудачника? Чьё поучительного в его исповеди?

[Who-ACC interest admissions-NOM literary failure-GEN? What-NOM enlightening-GEN in his confession-LOC?]

Who is interested in the admissions of a literary failure? Is there anything enlightening in his confession?

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the genitive is the one case that can be repeated to form chains. It is specifically the **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** in its bare case usage that makes this possible. Here is a chain of three consecutive genitive items:

Они боеви́й “Па́ртии исламского единства Афганиста́на.”

[They-NOM revolutionary-fighters-NOM “Party-GEN Islamic unity-GEN Afghanistan-GEN.”]

They are revolutionary fighters of the “Islamic unity party of Afghanistan.”
GENITIVE: A WHOLE 3—Prepositions and prepositional phrases

GENITIVE: A WHOLE is also used with the prepositions среди ‘among’, посреди ‘in the middle of’, and внутри ‘inside’. Here are some examples:

В перерыве среди участников начали циркулировать документы. [In break-LOC among participants-GEN began circulate documents-ACC.]
During the break documents began circulating among the participants.

Однажды мы с ма́чой бежа́ли по улице, торопясь в кинó, а посреди доро́ги лежа́л райо́нный алкогóлик, но не дядя Кóля, а другóй. [Once we-NOM with step-mother-INST ran along street-DAT, hurried to cinema-ACC, and in-the-middle road-GEN lay regional alcoholic-NOM, but not uncle Kolya-NOM, but other-NOM.]
Once my step-mother and I were running down the street, hurrying to the cinema, and in the middle of the road lay a local alcoholic, but it wasn’t uncle Kolya, it was someone else.

Самолёт взь́л, пото́м стал набирать отча́иние внутри себя. [Airplane-NOM howled, then began gather despair-ACC inside self-GEN.]
The airplane howled and then began gathering despair within itself.

There are dozens of prepositional phrases in Russian that function as complex prepositions followed by the GENITIVE: A WHOLE with the meaning ‘of’. The following table displays some of the more typical phrases, and is followed by a couple of examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepositional phrases meaning ‘of’ associated with GENITIVE: A WHOLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>в адрес</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>в виде</td>
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<tr>
<td>в границах</td>
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<td>в де́ле</td>
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<tr>
<td>в знак</td>
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<tr>
<td>в каче́стве</td>
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<tr>
<td>в направля́нии</td>
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<td>в опера́нии</td>
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<tr>
<td>в отноше́нии</td>
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<td>в ползь́ю</td>
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<td>в преде́лах</td>
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<tr>
<td>в проложе́нии</td>
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<td>в рамке́</td>
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<tr>
<td>в результа́те</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>в ро́ли</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>в смы́сле</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>в слу́чае</td>
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<tr>
<td>в сфёре</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
В рамках рабочего визита в Тегеран состоялась встреча нашего специалиста с представителями базирующейся в Иране афганской оппозиции.

In the context of a working visit to Tehran our specialist met with representatives of the Afghan opposition based in Iran.

Впервые в качестве полноправных участников международного соглашения выступили пятеро бывших советских республик.

For the first time the fifteen former Soviet republics acted in the capacity of full-fledged participants in an international agreement.

**Genitive: A Whole 4—Numerals and quantifiers**

A part of a whole can also be interpreted as an amount of the whole. In this use, the genitive is viewed as a set of objects or as a substance, and portions of the genitive item are measured out. This accounts for the use of genitive: a whole with numerals, with words meaning ‘add’, ‘subtract’, ‘full’, ‘enough’, as well as partitive uses.

Numerals come in many types. There are integers, fractions, and indefinite numerals such as сколько ‘how many’, немногу ‘some’, столько ‘so many’, мно́го ‘many/much’, немногу ‘not many/much’, мало́ ‘few/little’, бо́льше ‘more’, меньше ‘fewer/less’ немало́ ‘not a few’, and many other words indicating amounts. In this sampling of quantifiers with genitive: a whole, note that the quantifier and the quantified (in the genitive) do not have to appear next to each other in a sentence; in the third and fourth examples the genitive item quantified is the first word, whereas the quantifier is the last:

Я опозда́ла на пятна́дцать минут.
[I-NOM got-late on fifteen-ACC minutes-GEN.]

I was fifteen minutes late.
Although Russian does have words like приблизительно ‘approximately’, you can achieve a similar effect merely by inverting a numeral and the quantified genitive item. An approximate number of items is cited in the example below:

Их было штук пятьдесят.
[They-GEN was items-GEN fifty-NOM.] There were approximately fifty of them.

**GENITIVE: A WHOLE 5—‘Some’**

It is not uncommon for the genitive to signal quantification without a numeral or other word to express the amount. The “default” amount is usually equivalent to English some (often called the “partitive” meaning in textbooks), and with perfective verbs and certain nouns referring to substances the so-called “second genitive” ending (in -π/-¿) is used, as in the first example below.

Я выпил чайо, который заказал по телефону.
[I-NOM drank-up tea-GEN, which-NOM ordered along telephone-DAT.] I drank up the tea that I ordered by phone.

[—And vodka-NOM is there? — Is. — Give better vodka-GEN drink-up.] — And do they have vodka there? — Yes. — Let’s drink (some) vodka instead.

—А утром она говорит, без тебя не могу. — А ты что? — Ну, успокоил, денег дал...
[—And morning-INST she-NOM says, without you-GEN not can. — And you-NOM what-ACC? — Well, calmed, money-GEN gave...] — And in the morning she says, I can’t go on without you. — And what did you say? — Well, I calmed her down, gave her some money.
The genitive can have a quantitative meaning in the presence of a variety of words that express having or manipulating an amount of something. Some of these words are listed in the table and illustrated in the examples below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘sufficient quantity’</th>
<th>‘collect, pick up’</th>
<th>‘increase, add’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>достаток</td>
<td>набираться/набраться</td>
<td>прибавлять(ся)/прибавить(ся)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>достаточно ‘enough’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘become filled’</td>
<td>‘eat/have one’s fill’</td>
<td>‘decrease, subtract’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>исполняться/исполниться</td>
<td>наесться/наестььь</td>
<td>убавлять(ся)/убавить(ся)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>исполненный ‘full’</td>
<td>‘full’</td>
<td>‘be enough’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>полный</td>
<td>хватать/хватить</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Они бросала непонятные, загадочные фразы, исполненные какого-то потайного смысла.

[She-NOM flung incomprehensible, mysterious phrases-ACC, filled-ACC some secret meaning-GEN.]
She flung incomprehensible, mysterious phrases, filled with some secret meaning.

Он набрался храбрости и спросил: почему?

[He-NOM collected courage-GEN and asked: Why?]
He collected his courage and asked: Why?

Буквально два дня назад я запустил картчку в банкомат и обнаружил, что на моем счету за год не только не прибавилось процентов, но даже моих кровных существенно убавилось.

[Literally two days-ACC ago I-NOM put card-ACC in automated-teller-ACC and discovered, that on my account-LOC in year-ACC not only not increased owed-GEN me-DAT percents-GEN, but even my own-GEN significantly decreased.]
Just two days ago I put my card into the automated teller and discovered that in the course of a year not only had the percentage owed me on my account not been added, but even my own money had significantly decreased.

Она никогда не задумывалась над тем, хватит ли у неё сил и здоровья на осуществление своих планов и что будет потом.

[She-NOM never not thought above that-INST, is-enough whether by her-GEN strengths-GEN and health-GEN on realization-ACC own plans-GEN and what-NOM will-be afterward.]
She never thought about whether she had enough strength and health to realize her plans and what would happen afterward.
**GENITIVE: A REFERENCE 1—Dates and other reference points**

In the fourth and final meaning of the genitive, the focus of our attention is located near the genitive item, from which it is separated. This combination of proximity and separation allows the genitive to serve as a reference point in the domains of time and space and on scales of qualitative and quantitative assessment. In the domain of time, the most frequent use of the **GENITIVE: A REFERENCE** is with dates. Note that the genitive is only used for a date when something happens, in other words here the genitive item serves as a temporal reference point for an event:

На пресс-конференции, состоявшейся третьего декабря, шла речь о мерах, предпринимаемых правительством Российской для ускорения экономических реформ.


At the press conference which took place on the third of December, they talked about the measures that the Russian government has undertaken to accelerate economic reforms.

Восьмого августа 1927 г. М. Цветаева писала своей знакомой С. Н. Андрониковой-Гальперн.

[Eighth-GEN August-GEN 1927 year-GEN M. Tsvetaeva-NOM wrote own acquaintance S. N. Andronikova-Galpern-DAT.]

*On the eighth* of August 1927 M. Tsvetaeva wrote to her acquaintance S. N. Andronikova-Galpern.

A large number of prepositions locate items in both time and space with reference to **GENITIVE: A REFERENCE** as being without, after, before, behind, near, etc.56 A few of these prepositions operate in other domains, such as similarity (наподобие ‘in the likeness of’) or concepts (виду ‘in view of’, насчёту ‘on the matter of’). In many instances (those marked with asterisks) these prepositions clearly derive from earlier prepositional phrases (now written as one word), originally with a following **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** meaning ‘of’; compare these with the prepositional phrases that appear in the section on **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** above. These complex prepositions can be thought of as belonging to both **GENITIVE: A WHOLE** and **GENITIVE: A REFERENCE**.

56 Some of these prepositions have separate entries in the section on *Prepositions:*
The following examples display some of these prepositions:

Правительством Украины принято решение о проведении регистрации вернувшихся после эвакуации 1986 года людей и их прописки в населённых пунктах, расположенных вблизи зоны.

A decision has been made by the government of Ukraine about registering people who returned after the 1986 evacuation and awarding them residence in settlements near the zone.

“Жизнь прекрасна и удивительна!” — как воскликал товарищ Маяковский накануне самоубийства.

“Life is wonderful and amazing!” — as comrade Mayakovsky was exclaiming on the eve of *his suicide*.
The genitive case is used in idiomatic expressions that belong among the genitive: a reference prepositions, меж двух жерновов, literally ‘between two millstones’:

Когда сам уже начал пописывать, попал я меж двух жерновов — между правдой и ложью.
[When self-NOM already began write, fell I-NOM between two millstones — between truth-INST and falsehood-INST.]
When I myself began to write, I fell between a rock and a hard place — between truth and falsehood.

**Genitive: a reference 2 — у ‘by’**

The use of the preposition у could be a subchapter in itself. It can be variously deployed in the domains of space, possession, and causation. In its basic spatial use, у simply means ‘by’ or ‘near’:

У двери сидит мисс Филиппс и вяжет.
[By door-GEN sits Miss Phillips-NOM and knits.]
Miss Phillips sits by the door and knits.

By far the most common use of у is in the Russian construction that expresses ‘have’, у possessor-GEN + (есть) + possession-NOM, literally ‘by the possessor is a possession’, usually understood as ‘the possessor has a possession’. Here is an example:

Кроме вас, у семьи убитой были друзья или хорошие знакомые?
[Aside-from you-GEN, by family-GEN deceased-GEN were friends-NOM or good acquaintances-NOM?] 
Aside from you, did the family of the deceased have any friends or close acquaintances?

A similar construction is used for pain and other sensations coming from body parts (which are our inalienable possessions):

Вдруг я заметил, что у меня трясутся руки.
[Suddenly I-NOM noticed, that by me-GEN shake hands-NOM.]
Suddenly I noticed that my hands were shaking.

When the genitive item is a person, у + genitive: a reference can mean ‘at so-and so’s place’, as in this example:

Месяц назад я забыла у него очки от солнца.
[Month-ACC ago I-NOM forgot by him-GEN glasses-ACC from sun-GEN.]
A month ago I forgot my sunglasses at his place.
This construction can also be used to express causation, in other words, having someone do something for you. In this example: ‘doing my hair by someone-GEN’ = ‘having someone do my hair’:

Мне безразлично, у коего причисывать, я потом всё равно передела по-своему.
[Me-DAT indifferent, by who-GEN do-hair, I-NOM afterward all same redo in-own-way.]
I don’t care who does my hair, afterward I redo it my own way anyway.

**GENITIVE: A REFERENCE 3—Lack**

As we have already seen above under GENITIVE: A WHOLE, the genitive case in Russian is associated with quantification. The separation aspect of GENITIVE: A REFERENCE is here interpreted as negative quantification, or lack, a use commonly called the “genitive of negation”. Note that separation does not necessarily imply non-existence, it just means that the genitive item isn’t available. In the first example below there is of course no denial that the American way of life exists, but the hearer is separated from it by a lack of experience:

Вы просто не знаете американской жизни.
[You-NOM simply not know American life-GEN.]
You simply don’t know (anything about) life in America.

Here are a few more typical examples of the GENITIVE: A REFERENCE with negated verbs. Notice that the genitive item can be either the subject of the sentence (as in the first two examples) or the direct object (as in the last two):

В то же время в частном секторе никаких забастовок не было.
[In that same time-ACC in private sector-LOC no-kind strikes-GEN not was.]
At the same time there were no strikes in the private sector.

Когда я добрался до угла — еë нигде не было.
[When I-NOM reached to corner-GEN — she-GEN nowhere not was.]
When I reached the corner — she wasn’t anywhere.

Можно было догадаться, что сильного впечатления я не произвёл.
[Possible was surmise, that strong impression-GEN I-NOM not made.]
One could surmise that I did not make a strong impression.

Останавливаясь перед рисунками, ничего не вижу, кроме чёрно-белых пятен.
[Stop in-front drawings-INST, nothing-GEN not see, aside-from black-white spots-GEN.]
I stop in front of the drawings, but I don’t see anything except black and white spots.
The following table lists some words in Russian that express the concept ‘lack’ and are associated with the use of the genitive: a reference:

Expressions of lacking associated with genitive: a reference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘deficit’</td>
<td>дефицит</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘be deprived’</td>
<td>лишиться/лишиться</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘be lacking’</td>
<td>недостать/недостать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘deprive’</td>
<td>лишённый ‘deprived’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘shortage’</td>
<td>нехватка</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are a couple of examples for orientation:

Обычная наша жизнь была лишена всей этой роскоши, казавшейся театральной, предназначённой исключительно для счастливой минуты. [Ordinary our life-NOM was deprived-NOM all this luxury-GEN, seeming-GEN theatrical-INST, set-aside-INST exclusively for happy minute-GEN.]

Our ordinary life was deprived of all this luxury, which seemed theatrical, and was set aside exclusively for a happy time.

38 процентов (более трети!) москвичей снегут на нехватку не магазинов и ресторанов, а городских туалетов. [38-NOM percent-GEN (more third-GEN!) Muscovites-GEN complain on shortage-ACC not stores-GEN and restaurants-GEN, but municipal toilets-GEN.]

38 percent (more than a third!) of Muscovites complain of a lack not of stores and restaurants, but of municipal toilets.

Genitive: a reference 4—Comparison

Finally, distance gives you a perspective for comparing items separated along various scales of measure. Genitive: a reference allows you to examine the difference between the genitive item (which is held as the standard) and another item in a comparison. This motivates the use of the genitive with comparative adjectives and adverbs in constructions of the type: other item + comparative + standard-GEN, meaning ‘the other item is better/longer/stronger, etc. than the genitive item’. Here are some examples:

Общее дело должно быть выше личных интересов. [Common cause-NOM should be higher personal interests-GEN.]
The common cause should be higher (priority) than personal interests.

Глупо держать в помещении больше одной картины Рембрандта. [Stupid keep in room-LOC more one picture-GEN Rembrandt-GEN.]
It is stupid to keep more than one of Rembrandt’s pictures in the room.
Пел он, возможно, и хуже западных певцов, но трясясь сильнее.
[Sang he-NOM, perhaps, even worse Western singers-GEN, but shook stronger.] Perhaps he did sing worse than Western singers, but he shook more.

Год будет лучше предыдущего.
[Year-NOM will-be better previous-GEN.] This year will be better than the previous one.

EPILOGUE

The word genitive is related to generation and genesis, and all these words are derived from the Latin and Greek roots meaning ‘give birth’. Indeed giving birth is the means by which living creatures such as ourselves serve as sources for more of our kind. The genitive case continues the theme of the role of human beings that was so prominent in our discussion of the dative case. People get special treatment in the system of preposition and case combinations to express ‘going to’, ‘being at’, and ‘coming from’. Not only do we humans require κ + DAT when we are destinations, but as locations we demand γ + GEN and when we are places of departure we are the objects of от + GEN. Location γ + GEN ‘at’ a person can motivate a variety of interpretations, among them possession, being at someone’s place, or having that someone do something. Physical movement from and to items can be metaphorically extended to express human beings’ emotional withdrawal from and attraction to things through fear, disgust, desire, or expectation. Russian even asks us whether we can identify the object of our desire, thus grammatically capturing that very human dilemma of knowing that we want something but not knowing exactly what that something is. The genitive case is also very concerned with quantity in terms of amounts, deficiency, and comparison. In the current age of quantification, when we are all threatened with being reduced to statistics and identification numbers, it is curious to note that the Russian genitive integrates an appreciation of our distinctive human qualities with a focus on numerical concepts.