CHAPTER 10 | Back to Nouns: Genitive Case

Nouns are usually preceded by words that provide extra information about them. This is the case with articles, numerals, simple or pronominal adjectives (see Chapters 5 on page 66 and 6 on page 82).

(1a) αυτό το παλιό αυτοκίνητο
   “this (-) old car”

(1b) δύο παλιά αυτοκίνητα
   “two old cars”

Is there anything to come after the noun? Yes, other nouns. One such case is familiar to you as apposition (see Unit 3.2.3 on page 40):

(2) Ο άντρας της Μαρίας είναι από τον Καναδά.
   “Her husband, Peter, is from Canada.”

Apposition is not unique in this respect. Check the following sentence:

(3) Ο άντρας της Μαρίας είναι από τον Καναδά.
   “Mary’s husband is from Canada.”

The phrases in blue letters in sentences 2 and 3 modify the “head” noun άντρας, but in a different way. Peter and the husband in 2 refer to the same person (Peter is simply the name of the husband). Mary and the husband in 3 obviously refer to two different persons (Mary is the name of the wife). Syntactically, identity of reference like in 2 is the basis for agreement (in this case the nouns share the same gender, number, and case). Difference of reference like in 3 explains the lack of agreement between the two nouns. In the case of 3 the nouns differ in gender and case (sameness of number is only accidental here). The phrase ο άντρας represents the nominative, as you already know. The phrase της Μαρίας represents the genitive case, the third of the three major cases of the Modern Greek case system.

10.1 The Use of the Genitive

Unlike the nominative or the accusative cases, whose roles are related to major constituents of the sentence like the subject or the object, the genitive keeps a rather secondary role:
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(4a)  Ο ἄντρας τῆς Μαρίας εἶναι από τὸν Καναδά.
     “Mary’s husband is from Canada.”

(4b)  Ξέρω τὸν ἄντρα τῆς Μαρίας.
     “I know Mary’s husband.”

The phrase τῆς Μαρίας, a typical genitive, depends on the “head” noun ἄντρας in 4a-b. Note that the genitive is not affected by any shift in the case of the “head” noun. Note also that it always follows the “head” noun, never precedes it.

The genitive may also depend on a “head” noun in the genitive, as in the following example:
(I)  Ἐχω τὸ τηλέφωνο τοῦ ἄντρα τῆς Μαρίας.
     “I have the phone number of Mary’s husband.”

As far as meaning is concerned, the genitive covers a wide range of semantic relations. Among them, possession is perhaps the most elementary and easy to perceive. The genitive establishes a relation between the possessor (the noun in the genitive) and the possessed entity (the “head” noun).

(5a)  τὸ σπίτι τῆς Μαρίας
     “Mary’s house”

(5b)  η μύτη τῆς Μαρίας
     “Mary’s nose”

(5c)  η μητέρα τῆς Μαρίας
     “Mary’s mother”

Sentence 5a illustrates typical possession (you can sell your house), while sentences 5b-c are instances of natural possession (a nose or a mother are not things to be sold, but you’ve still got them).

Typical possession in Modern Greek may be mediated by the verb εἶμαι:
(II)  Ἀυτὸ τὸ σπίτι εἶναι τῆς Μαρίας.
     “This house belongs to Mary.”

The genitive also covers relationships that can hardly be perceived as possessives:
Here the “head” noun is usually an abstract noun deriving from a verb. If I turned this noun into the verb it derives from, the genitive would have to be the subject or the object of the verb (Mary’s resignation = Mary [SUBJ.] resigned).

The above examples illustrate only some basic uses of the Modern Greek genitive. After examining the form of the genitive I shall come back to matters of use in Unit 10.3 on page 145.

10.2 The Form of the Genitive

Let’s see how the genitive works for major categories of Modern Greek nouns and noun-dependent words. As we did with the accusative, here again our starting point will be the nominative.

10.2.1 The Genitive of Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOMINATIVE</th>
<th>GENITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ο δρόμος</td>
<td>του δρόμου</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο άντρας</td>
<td>του άντρα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο χάρτης</td>
<td>του χάρτη</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η ώρα</td>
<td>της ώρας</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η ζώνη</td>
<td>της ζώνης</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>το βιβλίο</td>
<td>του βιβλίου</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>το παιδί</td>
<td>του παιδιού</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>το πράγμα</td>
<td>του πράγματος</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1: Genitive Singular for Basic Modern Greek Nouns.

A few remarks about the genitive:
- Like with the accusative, the shift from the nominative to the genitive involves shifts in the definite article and in the ending of the noun.

(7) ο δρόμος → του δρόμου
η ώρα  → της ώρας
το βιβλίο → του βιβλίου
Like in the case of the plural, the genitive seems to obscure the boundaries between gender groups. Masculine nouns in -ος and neuter nouns in -ο behave the same way:

(8)  ο δρόμος → του δρόμου
     το βιβλίο → του βιβλίου

Masculine nouns in -ας/-ης and feminine nouns in -α/-η follow a complementary pattern. The former remove their final -ς, while the latter take a final -ς:

(9)  ο άντρας → του άντρα
     ο χάρτης → του χάρτη
tη ώρα → της ώρας
     η ζώνη → της ζώνης

Finally, neuter nouns ending in -ι or -μα behave in a similar way, since they get an additional unit. Note that for neuters in -ι the stress falls obligatorily on this unit:

(10) το παιδί → του παιδιού
     το σπίτι → του σπιτιού
     το γράμμα → του γράμματος

All nouns share the same genitive plural regarding the article and the endings:

(11) (ο δρόμος) → τον δρόμων
     (η ώρα) → τον ωρών
     (το βιβλίο) → τον βιβλίων

Listen again to the words παιδιού, σπιτιού. Do you hear the [i] before the new ending? I guess you don’t. Why? The now unstressed [i] comes before a stressed vowel and as a result it turns into a consonant (see Unit 1.6.2 on page 13).

Neuter nouns in -μα acquire this additional unit as an extra syllable. So, when the noun in the nominative is stressed on the third syllable, there is a problem: No Modern Greek word can be stressed beyond the antepenultimate syllable. In order to avoid this problem, the stress moves to the next syllable on the right.

(ΙΙΙ) το διαμέρισμα → του διαμερισμάτος

All nouns share the same genitive plural regarding the article and the endings:
This sounds like good news, but it’s not. Check the noun ὥρα. As you see, there is a shift in the position of the stress. The genitive (not only in the plural, but also in the singular) involves such shifts. You will have to wait for levels B1-B2 in order to have an overview of these shifts.

10.2.2 The Genitive of Noun-Dependent Words
As you already know, adjectives follow the inflectional model of some categories of nouns (see Unit 5.4). This is also true about the genitive, and here is how it goes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>NEUTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SINGULAR</td>
<td>ακριβού</td>
<td>ακριβής</td>
<td>ακριβού</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>ακριβών</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGULAR</td>
<td>νέου</td>
<td>νέας</td>
<td>νέου</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>νέων</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.2: Genitive Singular and Plural for Basic Modern Greek Adjectives.

The same holds for every regular adjective or pronoun of Chapters 5 and 6. There are, however, irregular cases in which you might need some help:

(ποιος) → ποιανού / τίνος
(ένας - ένα) → ενός - ενός
(κανένας - κανένα) → κανενός - κανενός
(τρεις - τρία) → τριών - τριών
(τέσσερις - τέσσερα) → τεσσάρων - τεσσάρων

Table 10.3: The Genitive of Irregular Noun-Dependent Words.

How Old Are You?
“How old are you” in Modern Greek goes like this:

(IV) Πόσοιν χρόνον είσαι;

The idiom involves the genitive of the noun χρόνος (“year”). Accordingly the answer involves the genitive, and consequently a problem if your age includes the irregular numerals of Table 10.3:

(Va) Είμαι είκοσι ενός χρόνων.
(Vb) Είμαι τριάντα τριών χρόνων.
(Vc) Είμαι εξήντα τεσσάρων χρόνων.
10.2.3 Possessive Pronouns: μου / σου / του
When a genitive needs not be present in speech again and again, possessive pronouns are here to help.

(12) Mary’s nose is big. Her eyes are blue...

Modern Greek possessive pronouns follow the syntax of the genitive case. This is why they always follow the “head” noun (note that the “head” noun is always preceded by the definite article in such constructions).

(13) το σπίτι της Μαρίας / το σπίτι της
“Mary’s house” / “her house”

In terms of agreement, Modern Greek possessive pronouns must have the same gender, number and case with the genitive they are to replace:

(14) το σπίτι της Μαρίας / το σπίτι της
το σπίτι του Πέτρου / το σπίτι του
το σπίτι του παιδιού / το σπίτι του

The full group of Modern Greek possessive pronouns is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>μου</td>
<td>“my”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>σου</td>
<td>“your”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>του / της / του</td>
<td>“his” / “her” / “its”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>μας</td>
<td>“our”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>σας</td>
<td>“your”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>τους</td>
<td>“their”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.4: Possessive Pronouns.

The pronouns of the 3rd person replace nouns in the genitive. What about the pronouns of the 1st and 2nd person? They replace nothing. In fact, they represent the only way to refer to “I” or “You” inside a possessive relationship.
Modern Greek possessive pronouns are phonetically weak words, words without an inherent stress. In order to acquire one, they are taken together with the “head” noun, to create a larger phonetic unit:

(VI) το σπίτι μου
    [to spítimu]

What if the “head” noun is stressed on the antepenultimate?

(VII) το τηλέφωνο μου
    [to tilefonomu]

Now this larger phonetic is stressed beyond the antepenultimate, a problem for the rules of the Modern Greek stress. This is why such units develop a secondary stress:

(VIII) το τηλέφωνό μου
    [to tilefonomu]

This secondary stress is stronger than the initial one, and always falls on the last syllable of the “head” noun:

(IX) το αυτοκίνητό μου
tο διαμέρισμα μου

10.3 Back to Use: “Categorial” Genitive

Compare the following sentences:

(15a) Η Άννα θέλει ένα ποτήρι νερό.
(15b) Η Άννα θέλει ένα ποτήρι του νερού.

Anna of sentence 15a needs a glass full of water (see Unit 3.2.3 on page 40). Anna of sentence 15b does not a glass full of water. She needs a specific type of glass made to drink water. The genitive in this case is used as a means to categorize glasses according to their type or function.

(16a) ποτήρι του νερού (ποτήρι για το νερό)
(16b) ποτήρι της μπίρας (ποτήρι για την μπίρα)
(16c) ποτήρι του κρασιού (ποτήρι για το κρασί)

The “categorial” genitive is really extended in Modern Greek to cover numerous items of everyday life. Here is a short list:
(17) κουτάλι (της) σούπας  “soup spoon = big spoon”
kουτάλι / κουταλάκι (του) γλυκού  “tea spoon”
φλιτζάνι (του) καφέ  “coffee cup”
φλιτζάνι (του) τσαγιού  “tea cup”
σοκολάτα υγείας  “bitter chocolate”
σοκολάτα γάλακτος  “plain chocolate”
γυαλιά ηλίου  “sun glasses”
χαρτί υγείας  “[hygienic] tissue paper”
φακοί επαφής  “contact lenses”

Note that the definite article may be omitted, a sign that the genitive and the “head” noun usually come together to form a periphrasis.

“Categorial” genitive can be paraphrased by the preposition για (κουτάλι της σούπας = κουτάλι για τη σούπα), but also by other prepositions such as από (φέτα Ηπείρου=φέτα από την Ηπείρο, see below), even by an adjective: σοκολάτα υγείας equals to bitter chocolate.

Φέτα
Φέτα is a popular Greek white cheese made from sheep’s milk or goat’s and sheep’s milk. It has been a protected designation of origin product (PDO, or ΠΟΠ in Modern Greek). According to the relevant legislation, only some areas of Greece (the mainland and the islands that belong to the prefecture of Lesvos) may use the term “feta” for the white cheese they produce, provided they use this kind of milk in fixed proportions and follow traditional practices.

Φέτα does not taste the same throughout these areas. Φέτα from Τρίπολη (a city in the Peloponnese) is famous for its spicy aftertaste, while φέτα from Ηπείρος is equally famous for its mild taste. It is then important to know where φέτα comes from. This is where the “categorial” genitive comes to make things clear:

(Χ) φέτα Τριπόλεως
φέτα Ηπείρου

SUMMARY
Chapter 10 introduces the genitive case of nouns and noun-dependent words and exemplifies its use taking possessive relations as a starting point. The chapter also examines possessive pronouns because of their syntactic and semantic affinity with the genitive.
KEY WORDS

genitive case, “head” noun, possession, possessive pronouns, “categorial” genitive

EXERCISES

1. Here is a typical Greek family. Check the family tree and fill in the blancs with the appropriate name in the genitive.

1. Ο Κώστας είναι ο μπαμάς ___________ και ____________.
2. Η Ελένη είναι η μαμά ______________ και η γιαγιά ______________ και ________________.
3. Η Κατερίνα είναι η γυναίκα ________________.
4. Ο Πέτρος είναι ο άντρας __________________.
5. Η Μαρία είναι η κόρη ______________ και _______________.
6. Ο Αλέξης είναι ο αδερφός _____________________.
7. Ο Κώστας είναι ο γιος ____________________ και ____________________.
8. Η Μαρία είναι η αδερφή __________________.
2. What is this? Match the pictures with the sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Είναι τα μουστάκια μιας γάτας.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Είναι η ουρά ενός σκύλου.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Είναι η μύτη ενός ελέφαντα.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Είναι τα πόδια ενός πουλιού.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Είναι η ουρά ενός ψαριού.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Είναι το στόμα ενός κροκόδειλου.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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