

On Genitive and ‘Stability’: Evidence from Russian

E. Rakhilina

Moscow, VINITI RAN, katia@plu.mccme.ru

This paper is a further development of [Rakhilina 2002], which was concerned with the semantic nature of the relationship between two objects expressed by genitive case in Russian. This relationship was said to be not a simple argumental (or quasiargumental) one, as it had been suggested in [Borschev, Partee 1999, Partee, Borschev 1998, 2000], but to include a special semantic component of ‘stability’. In my FASL presentation, I provided arguments supporting the idea of stability as a constant semantic feature of Russian Genitive; my arguments were based mainly on a detailed analysis of genitive constructions with *Nomina agentis*, including both grammatical and ungrammatical examples, such as *ucitel’ Petra I* ‘teacher of Peter I’, *ucenik Sokrata* ‘student of Socrates’, *portnye korolja* ‘tailors of the king’, *poslušnik prezidenta* ‘assistant of the president’, on the one hand and **rasskazčik rebenka* ‘story-teller of the child’, **skulptor Šekspira* ‘sculptor of Shakespeare’, **kontroler passażirov* ‘ticket collector of passengers’, **vor staruški* ‘thief of the old woman’, on the other hand.

The present study focuses on two other semantic types of Russian genitive constructions.

The first one is a well-known “genitive of measure” of the type *stakan vody* ‘a glass of water’. The analysis proceeds along the same line: after considering the restrictions on the construction, we argue that combinations like **reka cistoj vody* ‘river of clear water’, **futljar ockov* lit. ‘case of spectacles’, **komnata ljudej* ‘a room <full of people>’, **vaza cvetov* ‘a vase of flowers’, **akvarium vody* ‘aquarium of water’ and many others prove to be unacceptable exactly because there is no stability between the container and its contents. It is demonstrated that stability is not necessary an inherent characteristic of measure constructions – it may also be imposed by the context, as in the case of quantitative constructions or constructions with adjectives like *polnyj* ‘full’, *celyj* ‘whole, entire’, *ves’* ‘all’. Cf. the following pairs, where the first phrase is ungrammatical, but the second is acceptable: **vaza cvetov – neskol’ko vaz cvetov*; **karman kljucej – polnyj karman kljucej*, etc.

The second type of genitive constructions considered in some detail is usually called “genitive of time”. An important fact about this construction is that expressions with time terms are basically distributed between two different structures in Russian. The first one uses genitive, as in *lucšaja pesnja goda* ‘the best song of the year’, while the second one is adjectival, as in *nocnoj poezd* ‘night train’. The semantic difference between the two is considerable, and in most cases genitive cannot be replaced by the adjective, and vice versa, cf. **lucšaja godovaja pesnja*, **poezd noci*. My point is that genitive construction, unlike the adjectival one, conveys a stable relation between the situation and the period of time. In particular, genitive of time presupposes that the situation takes place within some definite period of time. Thus, the examples above are to be interpreted as follows: ‘the song which was sung <= popular> this year’, but not ‘*the train which arrived this night’ (the right interpretation here is ‘the train which arrives at night’).

This analysis, in principle, can be extended to other types of genitive constructions as well, for example, to those expressing part/whole relations (as *kraj stola* ‘edge of the table’). The more stable is the connection between a part and its whole, the more likely is genitive construction to be used. Therefore, the only possible construction to express inalienable possession is the genitive one. On the contrary, destroyed part-whole relations (representing a clear case of non-stable configuration) do not allow genitive, cf. *rucka ot caški* ‘handle <separated> from the cup’, but not *rucka caški* ‘handle of the cup’ in the sense above.

Thus, the feature of ‘stability’ can be said to organize and determine the domain of Russian genitive and to predict the restrictions which occur in different types of contexts.

References

- V. Borschev, B.H. Partee. 1999. Semantika genitivnoj konstrukcii: raznye podxody k formalizacii. In: E.V. Rakhilina, Ja.G. Testelec (eds.), *Tipologija i teorija jazyka: ot opisanija k ob"jasneniju*. Moscow: Jazyki ruskij kul'tury, 159-172.
- B.H. Partee, V. Borschev. 1998. Integrating lexical and formal semantics: Genitives, relational nouns, and type-shifting. In: R. Cooper, Th. Gamkrelidze (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd Tbilisi Symposium on Language, Logic, and Computation*. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State U., 229-241.
- B.H. Partee, V. Borschev. 2000. Genitives, relational nouns, and the argument-modifier distinction. In: C. Fabricius-Hansen, E. Lang and C. Maienborn (eds.), *Approaching the Grammar of Adjuncts. ZAS Papers in Linguistics 17*. Berlin: Humboldt University, 177-201.
- E.V. Rakhilina. 2002. The case for Russian Genitive case reopened. FASL presentation.