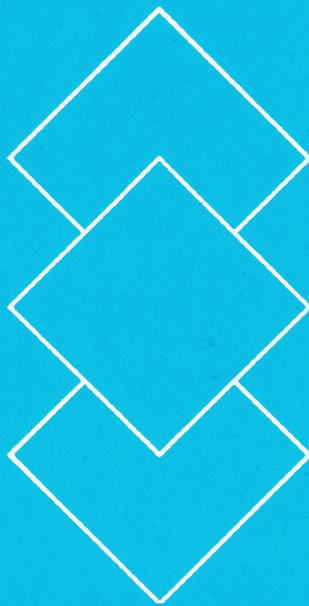


VOLUME12, NOMOR 2, OKTOBER 2010

ISSN 1410-9883

# CAKRAWALA PENDIDIKAN

FORUM KOMUNIKASI ILMIAH  
DAN EKSPRESI KREATIF ILMU PENDIDIKAN



## **CAKRAWALA PENDIDIKAN**

**Forum Komunikasi Ilmiah dan Ekspresi Kreatif Ilmu Pendidikan**

Terbit dua kali setahun pada bulan April dan Oktober

Terbit pertama kali April 1999

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Desain sampul: Prawoto

Setting dan Cetak: IDC Malang, Telp./Faks. (0341)552885

# THE PROBLEM OF GENITIVE CASE IN ENGLISH

**R. Hendro Prasetyanto**

**Abstract:** This paper describes the theory of genitive case which actually derives from the concept of case in several European languages like Latin. In Latin there are six different cases: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, and ablative cases. This article deals with only genitive case as it is most frequently used in English articles. The aim of the description of the preposition is to help students of English translate the phrases or sentences containing the genitive case. English has a set of prepositions and prepositional idioms (Wood, 1974). This paper deals with only preposition *of*, which is assumed to cover several meanings or ideas and then invites difficulties on the part of the learners. Wood proposed sixteen different meanings of the preposition under investigation. The preposition is followed by the genitive case as in Latin grammar. I gave the examples of the sixteen meanings in the form of phrases and sentences. At the last part of this article I include several texts as the teaching materials to be translated. Hopefully, those meanings will be of great help for teachers of reading class and translation class.

**Key words:** case, genitive case, English

Prepositions in English are so many not only in number but also in meaning. The preposition *of* for example, has various meanings depending on the context. Salim (2006) states that *of* with its variation has eleven meanings. Here are several examples. *A man of the west* means *orang yang berasal dari barat*. But *a man of noble birth* means *orang yang mempunyai latar belakang baik-baik*. In the sentence *Mary will be of age on her next birthday*, meaning that *Mary sudah cukup dewasa*. Another example is this: *Being as professional*

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R. Hendro Prasetyanto adalah Dosen STKIP PGRI Blitar



actor *of necessity* means working nights and Sundays. That prepositional phrase means *tidak ada jalan lain*.

The concept of case is of different points-of-view. Case can be viewed from the traditional and transformational grammar (Tarigan, 2009). Case represents the semantic and syntactic relationships among words in sentence. Case also represents the grammatical functions in such relationships. The relationships are marked by the grammatical or morphological inflections. The problem of subject, for instance, is identified by the use of nominative case. The agentive case, on the other hand, indicates the passive construction in which the doer of the action is marked by the use of preposition *by* plus noun, proper name, or pronoun.

In the case grammar we have a number of cases which cover nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, ablative, and agentive as we do in Latin grammar. Crystal (1991) states that case is a grammatical category which is used in the analysis of word classes (or their associated phrases) to identify syntactic relationship between words in a sentence. As this paper deals with the genitive case, the next explanations are focused on that case.

The genitive case is the use of *of* in prepositional phrase. The word genitive derives from Latin word meaning possessive. The word *genitive* comes from the Latin verb *gignere* or *genere* meaning to beget. The word shown of grammatical inflection expresses possession, some or a partitive concept. The word *possessive* comes from the Latin verb *possidere* meaning have or own. The genitive case embraces several ideas which are all conveyed by the preposition *of* in English. The construction with *of* may mean contents, subjective relationship, objective relationship, origin, possession, authorship, description or characterization, total or group, association or connection, composition.

#### THEORY OF SEMANTIC MEANING OF *OF*

Preposition *of* in English structure has a variety of meaning. The variety is dependent upon the context where the preposition *of* is used. Wood (1967) elaborated prepositional idioms. According to him this preposition is considered as probably the most frequently used of all the English prepositions, and precisely because of that this preposition is the one whose various uses and meanings are the most difficult to define and classify. Nevertheless, Wood tried to determine the various meaning in his research. There are sixteen basic meanings of preposition *of*. Below is a list of those meanings.

1. It indicates a source of origin like in the phrase of *a native of East Anglia, a man of Kent, born of peasant stock, to come of a good family*.



2. As a genitive equivalent, it indicates either possession or other notions closely related to that of possession like in the following examples: *the property of J.C. Smith, Esq, the home of the Brontes, the estate of Lord Townley, Sarah, wife of Henry Jones, the soldiers of the Queen, the cover of the book.*

In English we also have a post-genitive construction as in *a friend of mine, a cousin of John's, a friend of my father's, that old car of Jim's.*

3. *Of* is used to express the idea of 'associated or connected with'. The phrases like *the University of Oxford and Lord of Lancaster* mean the University associated to Oxford and the Lord connected to Lancaster.
4. *Of* is also used to express a partitive sense. The adjective partitive derives from the noun part. So partitive means part of something or group of things or people, like in *several of the members, three of them, most of us, half of the money collected.*
5. Sometimes the preposition *of* stands for concerning, regarding, or about as in *A Tale of Two Cities, anything of his cousins.*
6. The preposition *of* also indicates the concept of substance; it is to indicate the material of which something is made, like *in a box of cedar wood, a coat of mail, and a heart of gold.*
7. *Of* holds the concept of "consisting of, made up of" as in *a pile of earth, a heap of ashes, a row of trees, a bundle of papers, a gross of drawing-pins, a ream of paper, a pound of butter, a pint of milk.*  
This *of* may also refer to content of a vessel as in *a bottle of wine, a cup of tea, a sack of coal, a box of oranges, a jar of jam, a plate of soup.*
8. The noun follows the preposition *of* serves as an apposition like in *the game of cricket, the crime of larceny, the country of Kent, the city of New York, the Republic of South Africa, a charge of murder.*
9. The preposition *of* is used to express an objective relationship of the noun that follows *of* to the word that precedes it. *The Hunting of the Snark* means someone hunted the Snark. *The siege of Troy* means an army besieged Troy. *The execution of the murderer* means they executed the murderer. *The signature of a treaty* means that they signed a treaty. *The construction of the Forth Bridge* means that they constructed the Forth Bridge.

The same concept is also applied after an agent-noun made up from a transitive verb, or having the sense of a transitive verb attached to it. *The driver of the car* means the person who drove the car. *The author of the book* means the person who wrote the book. *The editor of a newspaper* means the person who edits the newspaper.

After such verbs as rob, deprive, cheat the preposition *of* means taken away



from. *They robbed him of every penny he had* means that his possession was taken away from him (by them).

10. The preposition *of* also expresses a subjective relationship between the noun that follows *of* and a verbal noun, intransitive in sense, that precedes it. *The resignation of the Prime Minister* was hourly expected means that the Prime Minister would resign. I am to be appointed Deputy Librarian *on the retirement of Mr. Fraser* means I am to be appointed when Mr. Fraser resigns.
11. The preposition *of* is used to introduce a specifying adjunct to a general noun, or to a corresponding verb like in a drink of water, a taste of vinegar, a smell of petrol, a sound of crying. *A taste of vinegar* means it tastes of vinegar, and *a smell of petrol* means it smells of petrol.
12. To denote characteristic of a thing or a person, we may use the preposition *of* after a noun like in *a matter of urgency, a person of importance, a girl of most attractive looks, a thing of beauty*. The same characteristic can sometimes be shown by the similar expressions of a thing or a person in slangs such as *a devil of a job, a hell of a day, a dickens of a time, a wilderness of a place, a gem of a house, a great hulking bully of a fellow, a fool of a person, a beast of man*.
13. After *within*, the preposition *of* denotes time or distance from a given point as in the following sentences: *We were within two miles of our destination when the car broke down*, and *He died within a few days of his ninetieth birthday*.  
However, the expression *within an ace of* means very near to as in *We were within an ace of success when we were compelled to give up*.
14. In a limited number of expressions, the preposition *of* indicates cause as in *He died of wounds, The child died of starvation, She was sick of a fever, the animal perished of hunger*.
15. Before nouns denoting particular times, the preposition *of* suggests regularity or a general practice. The following examples show the notion. *What do you do of an evening? We usually go to church of a Sunday. Of an evening* and *of a Sunday* mean every evening or in the evenings and every Sunday or on Sundays respectively.
16. In a few expressions, before a noun and an indefinite article, the preposition *of* gives an adverbial sense like *all of sudden* meaning suddenly, *of a truth* meaning truly, and *of necessity* meaning necessarily.

The preposition *of* is sometimes followed by adjective plus noun or pronoun and infinitive construction to refer to actions or deeds, and person. The adjectives meant include brave, *careless, clever, cruel, generous, good, kind,*



*stupid, thoughtful.*

*It was careless of you to forget to lock the door, How stupid of me to leave the map behind, and It is very good of you* are the examples of the use of such a construction.

The use of a superlative adjective followed by *of* plus a plural noun conveys the notion of *very* as in the sentences *He spoke in the softest of voices*, and *She had the sweetest of smiles*.

The superlative of idea like the greatest, the fittest, and the most glorious is expressed by the use of the preposition *of* to link a singular noun with the same noun in the plural. Such expressions as King of Kings, Lord of lords, and the flower of flowers mean in Indonesian *Raja di raja, Tuan segala tuan, bunga segala bunga* yaitu the marigold.

#### OTHER NOTIONS OF THE PREPOSITION *OF*

The following are the similar notions but under the light of Latin syntax. The problem of case is actually found in Latin. In Latin we have six different cases which are marked by the different suffixes or word endings, though some are of the same form. There are nominative case, genitive case, dative case, accusative case, vocative case, and ablative case. In English we do not have such cases but Latin cases constitute a great aid to understanding English construction with the preposition *of*. This article is limited to the treatment of genitive case which is characterized by the use of the preposition *of* followed by noun phrase or pronoun.

As for genitive of contents, this genitive case holds the meaning of "containing something". Examples 17, 18, and 19 represent the meaning.

- 17. a glass of water
- 18. a bag of peanuts
- 19. an apartment of four rooms

The genitive of subjective relationship or of authorship indicates the agentive role or thematic role. In number (20) Shakespeare wrote several plays. He was the doer or agent of those plays. The concept is also contained in number (21) and number (22) Mark wrote a gospel and Poe wrote stories.

- 20. The plays of Shakespeare
- 21. The Gospel of Mark.
- 22. The stories of Poe

The genitive case which holds the meaning of objective relationship refers to the idea of "about" or "regarding". In this case the noun after the preposition *of* is the object of the activity (done by the subject). This special genitive



has different meaning from the genitive of authorship. Sentence no 23 exemplifies such a meaning.

23. There has been a talk of peace between the two warring countries.

The genitive case of origin indicates the provenance of something. Simply speaking, it refers to the idea of "being made of (or from)". In number 24 and number 27, for example, it is shown that the house was made of brick and of wood. The same thing is also with the necklace.

24. A house of brick  
25. A necklace of gold  
26. A house of wood  
27. Arcade of plastic

The genitive case of possession may be used to indicate the one who owns, possesses, or belongs to someone or something. These three related ideas may be thus illustrated: *Amy's book was left in Amy's locker in Amy's school.* Amy owns the book; she possesses the locker; she belongs to the school.

The genitive possession, as this use is called, may be translated with *of* or with the ending of the English possessive case (-'s, -s') like in the following examples. In sentences (28) and (29) the pope is the minister owned by Christ. In other words, Christ is the possessor of the pope.

28. The pope is the minister of Christ.  
29. The pope is Christ's minister.  
30. A letter of mine  
31. The square root of a number  
32. The leaves of the book

In Latin this genitive of possession is sometimes can be replaced by what is called the dative case. This dative of the possessor is used to make a statement concerning ownership or possession. In this construction, the thing possessed is in the nominative case, the possessor in the dative case, and the verb used is *sum* (*esse*) 'to be'. Below are the examples of the use of that dative case.

33. *Liber est puero.*

This Latin nominal sentence has the English equivalents as *A book is to the boy*, and *The boy has a book*.

34. *Agri errant Petro.*

Sentence no 34 can be translated into English as *The fields were to Peter*, and *Peter owned the fields*.

35. ..., *sed erant illis omnia communia* (Act 4: 32)

This biblical text has the English equivalents as *..., they had all the things* and *..., all the things were to them*.

The genitive of description or characterization may be used as a predicate

as well as an attributive. This construction indicates a trait or an action which is characteristic of a certain type of person. The person has or possesses such a trait. In sentences (36) and (37) the genitive case serves as the predicate or exactly as the subjective complement. The phrase *of a good Christian* is the mark of the act of loving both God and neighbor. The same thing can be applied to sentences (38) and (39). The other examples can be represented by the following phrase like Peter, man of the year. In this case Peter may be regarded as the idol of many people of that year, Peter has all the traits required by all people in that year.

36. To love both God and neighbor is of a good Christian.
37. Loving both God and neighbor is characteristic of a good Christian.
38. A man of property
39. Peter was a (a man) of great faith.
40. John was of (belonged to) the Episcopal rank.
41. A man of the West.
42. A man of humble beginnings.
43. A man of honor
44. A period of plenty

This genitive case of characterization is sometimes replaced in English by the use of the preposition *with* plus a noun phrase. Sentence 45 below illustrates the use of the preposition *with*.

45. Yao Nan, a lecturer *with a Master's degree in applied linguistics* from the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, teaches English at the South China University of Technology.

The prepositional phrase with *of* may also indicate the concept of causes. This is called genitive of causes. In sentences (46), (47), and (48) the three different persons underwent something bad. The first person died due to the attack of flu while the second person exhausted because of heart attack. The third person dies as he suffered from starving.

46. The man died of flu last week.
47. He was reported tired of heart attack
48. The child died of starvation.

Another genitive case, namely genitive of total or group or part, is used to show that something is part of another. The noun after the preposition *of* constitutes the total or the group as shown in the following examples.

49. seven of them
50. one of us must go
51. He gave of his time
52. One of his brothers



This type is often found in writing which describes the number, total or part of the group. The four examples below illustrate the meaning or concept held by the genitive case of part. The examples were taken from Nunan (1991) on pages 67, 75, and 81 respectively.

53. A number of the major criticisms have been made of the phonic approach. Much of this criticism is based on research into human memory (p.67)
54. In one of the few empirical investigations of what actually goes on in second language classrooms, as opposed to what people say, or think, goes on, Richards (1989) presents a case study of an 'effective' second language reading teacher. (p.75)
55. What are some of the features which distinguish spoken from written texts? (p.81)

The genitive of deprivation is found in the combination of verb and prepositional phrase. This type indicates that someone lost something or underwent something or freed from something. Sentences (56) and (57) exemplify the concept concerned.

56. Peter was robbed of his way to the hidden cave.
57. His sister was cured of disease.

This genitive of distance is called so because it shows how far the distance is, for example, between the ghosted house and the river.

58. The ghosted house is located a mile east of the river.

The genitive case of charge is marked by the combination of verb and the preposition of plus noun as exemplified in the following examples.

59. He accused me of the theft.
60. I warn you of this issue.

The other two genitive cases are genitive of association or connection and genitive of composition. The genitive case of association is exemplified in the phrase like A School of Economy of London which means that the college has something to do with the city of London. The following examples are about this genitive case.

61. The University of Harvard
62. The University of Michigan
63. The Film of Chicago
64. The book of Indonesia

This genitive of composition holds the idea that something is made of some substance. A bag of leather means that the bag is made of leather. The same thing occurs to the following sentences.

65. A stick of wood
  66. A gun of metal or plastic
  67. A hut of thick leaves
-



68. A room of bricks

#### CORE POINTS OF THE GENITIVE CASE

From the discussion of the genitive case above, we can have some core points. First, that the genitive case in Latin is represented in English structure but the suffix which characterizes the Latin word ending is replaced by the use of the preposition *of* plus noun phrase. Second, as the Latin genitive case is of a variety of meanings, the teacher of English who knows well Latin can easily understand the structure of the preposition *of* plus noun phrase. Third, such knowledge can be of great help for teachers of English to translate such structures into Indonesian, and so the knowledge is very useful in translation class or in reading class.

In addition, knowledge is not enough; it should be exercised through regular practice. As the closure of this article the writer provides some other examples concerning the use of this structure as the translation exercises. These exercises can contribute some help for the teachers of English when they are facing the problems regarding the use of the preposition *of* in English. Sentences no. 68 to 75 were taken from *English Teaching Forum*, volume 47 number 3 2009, while sentences no. 76 to 82 were taken from *TIME*, August 2010. Sentences no. 83 to 86 were taken from Webster's New World Dictionary while sentences no. 88 to 90 were taken from Reader Digest.

69. Critical Literacy is drawn from a variety of *theories* such as critical language studies, educational sociology, and feminism (page 7).
70. In Marocco, as in many countries, many students have limited exposure to English outside of *the classroom* (page 15).
71. Intrinsic motivation – the most self-determined form of *motivation* – has been found to produce better reading outcomes (page 33).
72. Zuo Mingfang, an associate professor of English at South China University of *Technology*, has a Master's degree in teaching English as a Foreign Language from the University of *Reading*, Britain (page 37).
73. Virginia is the twelfth largest state in the United States in terms of *population* with just over 7,700,00 people, and it is 35<sup>th</sup> in terms of *area* with approximately 42,800 square miles of *land* (page 40).
74. Assateague Island is the largest of *Virginia's Eastern Shore islands*.
75. The story of *ponies* was made famous in a 1947 book by Marguerite Henry entitled *Misty of Chincoteque*, which has become a children's classic.
76. One of *the earliest* to exit could be the national Security Adviser, Jim Jones (page 11).



77. Democrats grumble that Conway hasn't grabbed hold *of the race* – neither candidate is a natural gutbucket backslapper – but there is plenty *of time* to do that (page 17).
78. "My backpack and flak jacket took most *of the damage*", says the corporal, lifting his arms to show scars left by the shrapnel wounds (page 25).
79. Then came a bit *of legal serendipity* (page 31).
80. One *of the humans* admiring them is Jonathan Franzen. Franzen is a member *of another perennially threatened species*, the American literary novelist (page 35).
81. What Brazil needs to turn the trickle *of outside funding* into a river is a dazzling IPO that generates global buzz and demonstrates the breakthrough thinking and true grit of the Brazilian entrepreneur (page 43).
82. Chang Apana walked the mean streets *of Honolulu* dressed in a Panama hat and brandishing a 5-fr. (1.5 m) bullwhip he'd designed himself (page 48).
83. The English language is full *of variety – of alternative ways of expressing an idea* (page xvii).
84. The dictionary is primarily a record *of how the words of a language* are used by those who speak and write it as a mother tongue (page xix).
85. Some variants result from our not having settled upon one *of two competing patterns* (page xx).
86. An important dimension of variation in English is the degree *of formality of a language event* (xxii).
87. In 1959 I was in Year Four *of primary school* and my brother Susanto was in Year Three *of junior high school* (page 31).
88. I was told to go for chemotherapy but I did not want to go through all the side effects *of chemotherapy* and opted for medication (to combat the cancer cells) (page 45).
89. Silver-haired and ramrod-straight, he was the father *of two grown sons*, a deacon *of his Baptist church* – and a man who took absolutely no chances with his aircraft (page 114).
90. Having searched the herbs and spices section *of my local supermarket*, I stopped a young sales assistant and asked, "Do you sell cloves?" (page 150).

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