

# Periphrastic vs. inflected genitive in different registers of English

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Preddiplomski studij

Engleski jezik i književnosti i Njemački jezik i književnost

Hrvoje Mesarić

**Periphrastic vs. inflected genitive in different registers of English:**

**A corpus study**

Završni rad

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Osijek, 2014.

This paper will provide an insight into the use of periphrastic and inflected genitive forms and their frequency in different registers of English. First, a theoretical background on the English case system, particularly the genitive case, will be provided and key guidelines for identifying genitive constructions will be established. Next, the similarity of function and meaning between a noun in the genitive case and the same noun as head of a prepositional phrase with *of* will be outlined, followed by the semantic types of genitive constructions which demonstrate how this choice between the *-s* or the *of*-genitive largely depends on the meaning expressed by the genitive. Apart from the semantic types of genitive, the choice between the *'s* and the *of*-genitive can also be influenced by other factors and these will in turn be discussed according to their categories (lexical, relational, syntactic, etc.)

The core part of this paper will consist of a selection of genitive phrases, divided into inflected and periphrastic genitive constructions, with the purpose of illustrating their frequency of use in the English language. The selection of phrases will be obtained from The Corpus of Contemporary American English web site, with special focus on the spoken and newspaper registers. The last and most important chapter will be dedicated to the presentation and interpretation of results with the purpose of confirming our hypothesis: The *'s* genitive forms with inanimate nouns are used more frequently in the newspaper register than in the register of spoken language.

**KEY WORDS:** inflected genitive, periphrastic genitive, frequency, spoken register, newspaper register

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## 1. Introduction

This paper will provide an insight into the use of periphrastic and inflected genitive forms and their frequency in different registers of English. Starting with a theoretical outline of the English case system and the genitive case, attention will be given to the competition between inflected and periphrastic forms in the choice of the genitive expression, discussing several factors that influence the speaker's or writer's choice of construction. Given the paper's title as a corpus study, the second chapter will discuss methodology, explain the choice of corpus and registers and outline the process of confirming or disproving our hypothesis. In order to do so it will need to be investigated which phrases are most frequent and in what form within an individual register, and then investigate which ones are generally the most frequent across both registers, spoken and newspaper. Therefore the core part of this paper will consist of a selection of genitive phrases, divided into inflected and periphrastic genitive constructions with the purpose of illustrating their frequency of use in the aforementioned registers. This section will conclude with the presentation of findings and interpretation of results, ultimately leading to the fourth and final part, the conclusion.

## 2. Case in the English Language

The main focus of this paper is to explore the frequency and differences in the use of inflected and periphrastic genitive forms. As the genitive is one of the two case forms in modern English, a basic theoretical background of case in the English language should first be provided.

Case is described as a formal category of the noun which defines its relations to other units (Biber et al 1999: 159). In Old English there were four cases distinguished by inflections: nominative, genitive, dative and accusative. These inflections have been much reduced in present day English, and their role as syntactic signals has to a large extent been taken over by word order and function words (Biber et al 1999: 159). The only surviving case marking for nouns is the genitive clitic and a noun which is unmarked for the genitive case is said to be in the common case (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 11).

According to Quirk et al (1985: 321), the genitive of regular nouns is realized in speech only in the singular, where it takes one of the forms /IZ/, /z/, or /S/, following the rules for the -s inflection of nouns and verbs. In writing, the inflection of regular nouns is realized in the singular by apostrophe + s ('boy's'), and in the regular plural by the apostrophe following the plural -s ('boys'). On the phrase level the genitive marks the end of a genitive phrase (Biber et al 1999: 159).

In many instances there is a similarity of function and meaning between a noun in the genitive case and the same noun as head of a prepositional phrase with *of* (sometimes called the '*of*-genitive') (Quirk et al 1985: 321). For example, in the sentence pair 'What is the ship's name?' and 'What is the name of the ship?', the first sentence's genitive inflection 'ship's' precedes and determines the head noun 'name' and they correspond in meaning with the *of*-construction of the prepositional phrase in the second sentence, where 'of the ship' postmodifies the head 'name'.

In many cases like this the two forms are equivalent in meaning and are both perfectly acceptable. In other cases, either the genitive or the *of*-construction will be a more appropriate choice, or the only one.

## 2.1 Semantic Types of Genitive

The choice between the 's or the *of*-genitive depends to a large degree on the meaning expressed by the genitive, or more precisely, the semantic type of genitive in question. The semantic classification of genitives used in this paper is a combination of the classifications proposed in the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* and *The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, as outlined by Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić (2013).

A very common semantic type of the genitive is the genitive of possession. In this type, there is a possessor-possessed relationship between the two noun phrases in the genitive expression. This implicit semantic relation can be made explicit by using a verb of possession in the clausal paraphrase like 'to have', 'to own', 'to possess' etc. (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 127). For example: 'my son's wife' can be paraphrased as: 'My son has a wife.', 'the gravity of the earth' can be paraphrased 'The earth has gravity'.

Possession is a very important, if not the most important meaning of the genitive, but there are many more.

The subjective genitive is a type of genitive where the genitive-marked noun phrase is coded as the subject of the paraphrasing clause (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 127). Some examples include: 'the boy's application' (paraphrase: 'the boy applied'), 'John's fall' ('John fell'), 'the rise of the sun' (paraphrase: 'the sun rose'), 'her parents' consent' (paraphrase: 'her parents consented') etc. It can also be pointed out that the head noun of the genitive expression is a nominalized form of the verb from the paraphrase ('application' – 'apply', 'fall' – 'fell').

The objective genitive type is similar to the subjective type in that the genitive-marked noun phrase fulfills a syntactic function in the clausal paraphrase, but this time it is the function of an object (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 128). For example: 'the criminal's imprisonment' can be paraphrased as 'someone imprisoned the criminal', which makes 'the criminal' an affected or patient object and the head noun 'imprisonment' is again a nominalized form of the verb in the paraphrase.

The genitive of origin can best be illustrated by an example: 'Michelangelo's sculptures' – paraphrase: 'Michelangelo created sculptures'. In this type the two noun phrases in the genitive expression represent the 'creator' or 'source' (the genitive-marked

noun phrase ‘Michelangelo’), and ‘the object or entity created’(‘sculptures’) (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 128). Other examples include genitives like ‘the wines of France’ (paraphrase: ‘France produced the wines’), ‘the girl’s story’ (‘the girl told a story’) and further exemplify how semantic relations are captured with verbs like ‘to create’, ‘to draw’, ‘to write’, ‘to invent’, or others from the same semantic field.

In a descriptive genitive the genitive-marked noun phrase describes the head noun of the genitive expression in the following way: ‘a women’s college’ – ‘a college for women’, ‘a doctor’s degree’ – ‘a doctoral degree’, ‘a doctorate’.

Genitives of measure express duration, distance, length, or value (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 128). Examples include: ‘a moment’s thought’, ‘an hour’s ride’, ‘two hours’ time’, ‘two months’ imprisonment’, ‘a stone’s throw away’, ‘fifty thousand dollars’ worth’, etc. All the nouns in these examples are realized as genitives, but some inconsistencies do exist. Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić point out that there are examples in the corpus where the expression of measure is realized as a common noun with the regular –s plural, like in expressing duration

- (1) *‘Subsequent laws required the death penalty for those who cooperated with pirates and six months imprisonment for those who failed to defend their ships against pirates’*,

or is realized as a common noun with a zero plural, in expressing value:

- (2) *‘Now it’s all charge cards, but back then it was five-dollar bills, ten-dollar bills.’*

Their examples largely confirm an earlier report to that effect from Biber et al (1999). Following Biber et al (1999) they also point out that with a plural measure expression and an uncountable head noun such as ‘worth’ (‘ten dollars’ worth’) or ‘throw’ (‘a stone’s throw’) there is a choice between a common case plural and a genitive plural, but when the head noun of the genitive expression is countable (e.g. ‘bill’ in ‘five-dollar bill’) and an explicit indication of number is included, the measure expression can also be used with the noun in the common case and zero plural (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 129).



Partitive genitives express a part-whole relationship between the nouns in the genitive expression and the *of*-genitive is the usual form (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 130). Examples: ‘part of the problem’ (paraphrase: ‘the problem is divisible into parts’), ‘most of us’ (paraphrase: ‘us including the speaker, the hearers and probably others’)

Temporal genitive, also known as genitive of time, is used to specify location in time and is frequently used in the news register where this type of information is especially important (Biber et al 1999: 295). Some examples include: ‘last week’s newspaper’, ‘(on) a summer’s day’, ‘yesterday’s job’, ‘Friday’s show’, etc. It is also possible for genitives to occasionally alternate with common case forms of some temporal nouns (Biber et al 1999: 295). For example: ‘The pale light of a winter day / a winter’s day.’

Apposition is a relationship between linguistic units which have the same referent: e.g. ‘Dickens, the writer...’; ‘New York, the city that never sleeps’, etc. This relationship can be exemplified by paraphrase with the verb ‘to be’: ‘Dickens is a writer’; ‘New York is a city that never sleeps.’ In much the same way, the appositive genitive is a type of genitive expression where the same copula relationship exists between its constituent noun phrases (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 131). This type of genitive is practically restricted to the periphrastic *of*-construction, so it includes examples like: ‘The city of York’ (‘York is a city’), ‘the pleasure of meeting you’ (‘meeting you is a pleasure’) etc.

## 2.2 Other Factors in the Choice of the Genitive

Apart from the semantic types of genitive, the choice between the ‘s and the *of*-genitive can also be influenced by other factors. Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić (2013: 131) adopt the classification proposed by Quirk et al. (1985: 1275ff) and illustrate the following set of factors: lexical factors, relational factors, subjective and objective relations, syntactic factors and communicative factors.

### 2.2.1 Lexical factors

The first to be discussed are lexical factors. They govern how the choice of ‘s or *of*-genitive is related to the type of the dependent noun in the genitive construction. The ‘s genitive is

generally favored by those gender classes which are highest on the gender scale; personal names ('Jane's car'), personal nouns ('the lady's car') and animal nouns, particularly those denoting "higher animals" ('the horse's tail'). The 's genitive also tends to be used with collective nouns which emphasize the aspect of "organized individuals", in particular those denoting authoritative and other organizational bodies (Quirk et al 1985: 324). Some examples include: 'the family's car', 'the government's economic plans', 'the nation's resources', 'the committee's decision', 'the Company's directors' etc.

Some non-personal nouns, especially geographical nouns and nouns denoting institutions, locations and time allow both constructions, for example:

Geographical nouns - Continents: Europe's future – the future of Europe

Countries: China's leaders – the leaders of China

States: Florida's history – the history of Florida

Cities and towns: London's streets – the streets of London

Universities: Oxford University's history – the history of Oxford University

Despite the above examples, the choice may not always be free (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 132). For example, both constructions 'the economy of China' and 'China's economy' are possible, but with the construction 'the map of China' the same conversion ('China's map') is quite awkward. Nouns which signify something that has a close connection to the people of the country are most likely to be acceptable in the 's genitive (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 133).

Locative nouns denoting regions, institutions, heavenly bodies, etc. and temporal nouns function in much the same way as geographical names. Some examples:

Locative nouns:

the earth's rotation/climate/resources/history/surface

the school's history/headmaster/reputation/aims/library

the world's economy/population/children/oil

the hotel's entrance/owner/facilities/tennis court/value/style

Temporal nouns:

the decade's events, this year's sales

a day's work, today's business

a moment's thought, yesterday's paper

The final group of nouns that can also vary between the 's and the *of*-genitive could be called nouns of 'special interest to human activity' and the likelihood that a noun would fit into this category depends largely on subjective evaluation (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 133). Some examples include:

the game's history / elite / future

the body's needs / response / reaction / metabolism

the brain's total solid weight / activity / pathways / function

duty's call

the novel's structure / characters / plot / action

So far, genitive constructions have been identified by reference to certain classes of the genitive noun (personal, collective, temporal, etc.) but some constructions with the genitive can best be described in terms of specific lexical noun heads (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 134). For example: 'edge' ('the water's / river's edge'), 'end' ('at his journey's / life's end'), 'surface' ('the water's surface'), 'for X sake' ('for God's sake'). Some of them are also idiomaticized so they do not have a valid *of*-form: 'length' ('at arm's length'), 'reach' ('within arm's reach'), 'throw' ('at a stone's throw'), 'worth' ('their money's worth')

### 2.2.2 Relational factors

Some semantic relations between the noun phrases in the genitive expression can not be expressed by the 's genitive, such as quantitative and qualitative relations (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 134). For example, 'a glass of water' or 'this kind of research' do not have valid 's genitive alternatives ('a water's glass' or 'this research's kind' are not possible).

### 2.2.3 Subjective and objective relations

If the genitive marked noun phrase functions as the subject or the object in the paraphrase, we speak of either a subjective or an objective relation, and that may influence the choice of the genitive construction (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 134).

For example, in the construction ‘the imprisonment of the murderer’, the genitive marked phrase ‘the murderer’ would become the object in the construction’s paraphrase ‘(Someone) imprisoned the murderer.’ and the demonstrated relation would be called objective.

The same principle applies to the construction ‘the arrival of the train’, which could be paraphrased as ‘the train arrived’, wherein ‘the train’ takes on the role of the subject and the relation is called subjective.

It is uncommon for the *s* genitive to be used with the objective relation and the of-construction is preferred, especially if neither of the noun phrases in the genitive expression correspond morphologically to the verb in the paraphrase (‘\*science’s men’ – ‘men study [science]Od’), but when the head noun of the genitive expression corresponds morphologically to the verb in the paraphrase, the ‘s genitive is possible (‘the murderer’s imprisonment’ – ‘someone imprisoned [the murderer]Od’) (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 135).

As for the subjective relation, both genitive constructions are possible, regardless of morphological correspondence (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 135); ‘the train’s arrival’ / ‘the arrival of the train’ – ‘the [train]S arrived’

There are some examples where the genitive expressions could be interpreted ambiguously, but such ambiguity is usually resolved in the context and further elaboration on this problem will not be necessary for the purpose of this paper.

### 2.2.4 Syntactic factors

If there are any additional modifiers present, they add weight to the genitive expression, and that may influence the choice of the genitive (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 137). For example, if the head noun of either of the two noun phrases in a superordinate

genitive expression is postmodified restrictively, that noun phrase must come second and this will limit the choice of the genitive construction (Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013: 137):

(3) *'a friend's **arrival** which had been expected for several weeks'*

(4) *'the arrival of a **friend** who had been expected for several weeks'*

In (3) 'arrival' is postmodified restrictively and the 's genitive is the only possible choice because 'arrival' has to appear next to its modifier.

In (4) 'friend' is postmodified restrictively and for the same reason only the of-form is possible.

#### 2.2.5 Communicative factors

Communicative factors are bound to the context of the genitive expression. According to the principle of end-focus, final elements of a construction (i.e. a phrase or a sentence) tend to attract more focus or attention, so the preference for one or the other type of genitive expression can often be explained by the speaker's choice to give some elements more prominence than others: (e.g. 'world's economy' – 'economy' in focus, 'economy of the world' – 'world' in focus)

The context also determines whether elements can be regarded as known (rather than new) information, either because they have been introduced earlier in the discourse or because they are considered to be general knowledge (Biber et al 1999: 305). Already known information is usually also expressed with shorter forms, because they are sufficient for the task, while more explicit and therefore possibly longer constructions tend to better facilitate the acquisition of new information.

### 3. Methodology

The main topic of this paper is to explore natural occurring data in order to uncover tendencies in the use of inflected and periphrastic genitive constructions in different registers of English. We are aware that this is a very complex subject with numerous factors that simultaneously affect the choice between the inflected and periphrastic forms, but since the subject needs to be handled appropriately, yet still within the limitations of this paper, we have settled on the following procedure.

First, we have decided to base our research on data obtained from the spoken and newspaper registers of the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Why was exactly this corpus chosen?

According to The Corpus of Contemporary American English web site, the corpus is composed of more than 450 million words in 189,431 texts, including 20 million words each year from 1990-2012. The most recent addition of texts (Apr 2011 - Jun 2012) was completed in June 2012. This not only makes it quite extensive, but also up-to-date and able to provide relevant information about the current trends in the English language. The web site also states that for each year (and therefore overall, as well), the corpus is evenly divided between the five genres of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. This also makes it convenient to explore and compare different registers of the language.

The newspaper and spoken registers were chosen because they are roughly the same size and because of the hypothesis that in the newspaper register, the 's genitive tends to be used more frequently with some inanimate nouns than in the register of spoken language; the reasons for that possibly being the needed brevity, conciseness and more personal, approachable and excitable character of such discourse since it aims to catch the reader's or listener's attention by emphasizing the importance or gravity of its statements.

Since the goal of this paper is to explore which phrases are most frequent and in what form within an individual register, and then see which of them are the most frequent between both registers, the choice of genitives had to be limited to phrases which can be found in both 's and *of*-forms and which would also have to compete in meaning.

Idiomatic and other fixed expressions such as ‘bachelor’s degree’, ‘harm’s way’, ‘Valentine’s Day’ and many others, some of which were also mentioned above, were likewise excluded because of the obvious reason that they have no alternative forms, or at least none that would be relevant to the purpose of this paper.

Considering the fact that the most basic criterion in the choice between inflected or periphrastic constructions is the distinction animate / inanimate and other factors like syntactic factors, relational factors or the objective vs. subjective relation etc. can only blur the lines, the most appropriate course of action for the purpose and scope of this paper is to limit the gathered data to genitive constructions where the noun denotes something animate, or more precisely human (e.g. ‘boy’s bicycle’), on one hand and to genitive constructions where the noun denotes something clearly inanimate (e.g. ‘the wheel of a car’) on the other. Another way to illustrate this is to say that the research will focus on genitives with nouns that are, on one hand, as high as possible on the noun class and gender scales, and on the other hand, as low as possible. Based on this and given that the main focus of this paper is to explore how frequently each of the genitive forms is used, ten most frequently used genitive ‘s phrases and ten most frequently used *of*-phrases from each register (spoken and newspaper) will be chosen for analysis, bringing the total number of examined phrases to 40.

#### 4. Corpus Study and Results

First, the corpus will be searched in order to get a rough idea of how frequent actually the *s'* and the *of*-genitive constructions are in the spoken and newspaper registers. The search query  $[n^*]'s [n^*]$  will be used to retrieve results for the *'s* genitive and the query  $[n^*]$  of  $[n^*]$  will be used for the *of*-genitive forms. Of course, there is always a chance that these queries will also return items that do not correspond to the desired forms, but if the differences between registers and forms are drastic, those misidentified items can not distort the results significantly. Here are the results:

Table.1. Rough representation of inflective and periphrastic forms' frequency per register

Form	Register	
	Spoken	Newspaper
Periphrastic ('of')	85492	54226
Inflective ('s')	13826	19960

The spoken register counts 95565075 words. The search for the *of* construction returned 85492 results, while the count of *'s* forms settled at 13826. This shows that in the spoken register the *of*-construction is 6 times more frequent than the *'s* forms.

The newspaper register counts 91727452 words and 54226 of those corresponded to the *of*-construction, while only 19960 items were listed as *'s* forms. This means that the *of*-forms in the newspaper register are 3 times, or more precisely 2.7 times, more frequently used than the *'s* forms.

As the numbers differ quite significantly (85492 vs. 13826 in spoken and 54226 vs. 19960 in newspaper), it can therefore be safe to say that the *of*-genitive significantly outnumbers the *'s* genitive in both registers.

Be that as it may, by comparing the number of *'s* forms in the two registers, the newspaper register actually shows that the *'s* forms are more frequent there than in the spoken register. (19960 vs 13826 items)



These results are also confirmed by Biber's claim that *of*-phrases outnumber 's genitives, and not just here in these two registers, they do so in all registers. Biber et al. (1999: 302) provides a possible explanation for this by stating that this may be so due to a general preference for less compact structures, and since postmodification also produces a more transparent means of expression by making it clearer which words go together (for example, by choice of preposition), it is preferred.

However, Biber et al adds other interesting results about the spoken and newspaper registers that may be relevant for our discussion. First they say that conversation has by far the lowest frequency both of 's genitives and *of*-phrases, but also, more importantly, that news has by far the highest frequency of the 's genitive forms (Biber et al. 1999: 301). The cause for this is the very low frequency of nouns in conversation and therefore the frequency of elements dependent upon nouns is also very low. On the other hand, the reason why the frequency of 's genitive forms is particularly high in the news register is presumably because it represents a good way of compressing information (Biber et al. 1999: 302).

#### 4.1 Most frequent genitives per register

Now, as already mentioned before, the spoken register and the newspaper register will be individually searched using the same queries as above ( [n\*] 's [n\*] and [n\*] of [n\*]) and 10 most frequently used 's and *of*-genitives will be listed along with their ratios, rounded to the nearest tenth where needed.

Table 2.1. Spoken register: 10 most frequent 's genitives and their *of*-genitive alternatives.

#	'S genitive	Frequency	Ratio	Frequency	Of-genitive
1.	people's lives	553	6,5:1	85	lives of people
2.	nation's capital	399	79,8:1	5	capital of the nation
3.	people's minds	269	7,9:1	34	minds of people
4.	president's plan	264	264:1	1	plan of the president
5.	president's speech	250	250:1	1	speech of the president
6.	women's health	230	57,5:1	4	health of women
7.	women's rights	211	5:1	42	rights of women
8.	child's life	125	13,9:1	9	life of a child
9.	governor's office	124	11,3:1	11	office of governor
10.	people's attention	118	14,8:1	8	attention of people

As expected, the 's genitive is generally favored by those gender classes which are highest on the gender scale and the higher up the scale the noun is, the more frequently it is used with the 's genitive. For example, the genitives above involving the noun 'people' are very frequent because the term is very common and generic and can therefore be applied in a vast number of situations. They are paired with nouns like 'lives', which are generally of importance and value to everyone, while 'minds' refers to people's opinions, which everyone has and discusses often.

Their *of*-genitive counterparts are also quite commonly used, especially in comparison to some of the other examples from the list, but they are primarily used for communicative reasons, namely to give special emphasis or focus to one of the nouns, depending on the speaker's or writer's intentions, which he then places at the end of the expression. For example, 'people' will be perceived with more emphasis if used in the form 'lives of people', and the same applies to 'lives' in 'people's lives':

- (1) *'We need to strengthen the economy and improve [the lives of people]in this country'*
- (2) *'You are constantly trying to improve other [people's lives] and to improve your own life.'*

The examples 'child's life' / 'life of a child' and 'people's attention' / 'attention of people' behave in much the same way, but are much less frequent:

- (3) *'The information could save your [child's life].'*
- (4) *'Is that more important than [the life of a child]?''*

Regarding emphasis, the two examples involving the noun 'women' are also quite similar. While the example 'women's health'/'health of women' has an expectedly high ratio in favor of the 's genitive, the example 'women's rights' / 'rights of women' is much more balanced and the *of*-construction sees much (10 times) more use, which has its roots in the current social trends and increased activity in the area of women's rights:

- (5) *'They are rolling out a huge initiative for [women's health] around the world.'*
- (6) *'What this is all about is not about method; it's about preserving [the health of women] and a stealth attack on liberty.'*
- (7) *'Women are being encouraged to ask about [women's rights].'*
- (8) *'Is the government increasing or decreasing [the rights of women]?''*

In the two cases involving the noun 'president' the 's genitive form has become an almost idiomatic expression. With a ratio of 250:1 in favor of the 's genitive and just one instance of periphrastic use for each example, the *of*-genitive use is almost non-existent, but since the corpus is based on American English and therefore also reflects trends of their society, the result could be interpreted as the noun 'president' representing a very familiar concept, a sort of given information, that needs no special introduction, explanation or emphasis. At the same time this allows the other noun in the genitive expression to be more prominent as a sort of new information.

In the case of ‘nation’s capital’ / ‘capital of the nation’ there is a peculiar difference in the use of the later form. While the inflected form is used quite frequently and with its primary meaning (Washington D.C.), it seems that the periphrastic form is used only in constructions like:

(9) *‘Rhode Island has been called by some [the lead paint capital of the nation].’*

(10) *‘This is [the RV, or recreational vehicle, capital of the nation].’*

(11) *‘I mean, New York used to be [the crime capital of the nation], now it's not.’*

All five results follow the same pattern, so it would seem that the periphrastic form is used with a more figurative meaning and the ‘s and *of*-forms therefore would not be freely interchangeable.

In the case of ‘governor’s office’ / ‘office of governor’ there was no phrase like ‘office of the governor’ listed, so the closest one, ‘office of governor’, had to be used. However, it has to be pointed out that there is also a slight difference in meaning between those two phrases:

(12) *‘Governor Blagojevich has declined the opportunity to voluntarily leave the office of governor.’*

(13) *‘For this reason, I am resigning from the office of governor.’*

(14) *‘... the duties of the office of governor...’*

(15) *‘While the governor 's office says some are supporting the move, others say it's ridiculous.’*

(16) *‘That means someone in the governor 's office said...’*

Judging by the examples from the corpus, the genitive in ‘governor’s office’ has the function of a complex determiner (cf. *Whose office?* – *his* office), while ‘office of governor’ denotes a **type** of position or duty, which illustrates this genitive’s function as a premodifying structure.

Table 2.2. Spoken register: 10 most frequent *of*-genitives and their 's genitive alternatives.

#	Of-genitive	Frequency	Ratio	Frequency	'S genitive
1.	people of Iraq	198	49,5:1	4	Iraq 's people
2.	invasion of Iraq	165	3,8:1	43	Iraq 's invasion
3.	role of government	154	4,1:1	38	government 's role
4.	governor of California	148	7:1	21	California 's governor
5.	people of America	136	68:1	2	America 's people
6.	government of Iraq	126	6:1	21	Iraq 's government
7.	end of life	86	28,7:1	3	life 's end
8.	lives of people	85	1:6,5	553	people 's lives
9.	people of Haiti	80	40:1	2	Haiti 's people
10.	streets of Baghdad	76	76:1	1	Baghdad 's streets

Since most of these examples, as well as their frequency, are functionally similar to the previous set, they won't be discussed here at length. However, the 'invasion of Iraq' / 'Iraq's invasion' example showed an interesting feature. The meaning of the 'invasion of Iraq' form is quite clear, but in its 's genitive alternative, however, the subject / object relation is not explicit, so by looking just at the phrase itself it is hard to tell whether its meaning is that Iraq was invaded (by the USA) or did the invasion (of Kuwait) itself. Nevertheless, the distinction was evident from the context, since almost all of the examples were dated around 1991 and mention Kuwait in some way. In the form 'invasion of Iraq' that relation is more explicit and its meaning generally refers to the more recent 2003 invasion of Iraq by the USA, with only less than a dozen sentences from the corpus referring to USA's first invasion in 1991.

Table 2.3. Newspaper register: 10 most frequent 's genitives and their *of*-genitive alternatives.

#	'S genitive	Frequency	Ratio	Frequency	OF-genitive
1.	children's hospital	425	32,7:1	13	hospital for children
2.	people's lives	338	9,1:1	37	lives of people
3.	women's rights	304	8,2:1	37	rights of women
4.	mayor's office	302	30,2:1	10	office of mayor
5.	nation's capital	294	29,4:1	10	capital of the nation
6.	women's health	230	57,5:1	4	health of women
7.	children's books	210	10:1	21	books for children
8.	father's death	126	2,3:1	54	death of his father
9.	nation's history	125	15,6:1	8	history of our nation
10.	children's health	121	15,1:1	8	health of children

Given that many of the nouns are the same as in Table 2.1., these examples are generally very similar to the ones there. But this also makes it easier to compare the two registers for their preferences for the 's or *of* genitive.

The examples 'mayor's office' and 'office of mayor' behave here in the same way 'governor's office' / 'office of governor' do above, only with greater frequency and ratio in favor of the 's genitive form, as generally expected of the newspaper register. The 'nation's capital'/'capital of the nation' case was also already discussed above (Table 2.1.), however, in this case the ratio in favor of the 's genitive is not so dramatic: in the spoken register it was roughly 80:1, here it is 29:1. At this point we see no specific reason for this finding and attribute it to corpus effects which need to be explored in greater depth.

The other example with the noun 'nation' here is a bit peculiar though. Although the 's genitive is more prevalent than the *of* genitive, as expected, its preferred periphrastic form is 'history of **our** nation', rather than the semantically closer 'history of the nation'. We could say that the principle of end-weight here conspires with some kind of empathy the speaker/writer must feel towards a nation that is his own.

The example 'father's death'/'death of his father' shows similar behavior, with 'death of **his** father' being far more common than the perhaps semantically more neutral form 'death of the father' without the specific possessive determiner. The *of* constructions with possessive determiners are generally more common, with 'death of her father' (13 occurrences) and 'death of my father' (6 occurrences) following suit. The reason for this is probably because such phrases carry information that is quite important in communication (- *Whose death?*). This explains the obvious tendency for the noun *death* and its *possessive* determiner to appear in a position where they will receive most attention – at the end of the genitive phrase.

Table. 2.4. Newspaper register: 10 most frequent *of*-genitives and their 's genitive alternatives.

#	OF-genitive	Frequency	Ratio	Frequency	'S genitive
1.	end of the year	824	2,2:1	378	year 's end
2.	end of the day	651	9:1	72	day 's end
3.	turn of the century	334	334:1	1	century 's turn
4.	end of the season	321	3,1:1	104	season 's end
5.	end of the month	232	7,3:1	32	month 's end
6.	start of the season	165	27,5:1	6	season 's start
7.	capital of the world	150	75:1	2	world 's capital
8.	end of the world	147	36,8:1	4	world 's end
9.	end of the war	146	2,4:1	62	war 's end
10.	heart of the city	60	6:1	10	city 's heart

Given that the initial search query [n\*] of [n\*] is limited to very specific forms of examples and that they were quite rare and far apart, we extended the search query to [n\*] of \* [n\*]. This allowed us to include phrases with an extra element between 'of' and the second noun (such as a determiner, like in the phrases on the left in Table 2.4. above). After

merging the two sets of information, we obtained far better results in terms of showing the most frequent of-forms of genitive in this register.

Starting at the top of the list, the reason these forms are so frequent could lie in the fact that they all come from a semantic field that is very common and very important when talking about news – time and temporal relations. It could be said that news is by its very nature bound to and defined by time. Nouns like ‘end’, ‘start’ and ‘turn’ denote shifts and dynamic changes, while ‘year’, ‘day’, ‘century’, ‘season’, ‘month’ define durations, points in time and context for human activities - all of which are essential in talking about news. Since these terms see so much use and people get accustomed to them, it could therefore be more likely for them to be used in the ‘s genitive form. (c.f. ‘end of the year’/‘year’s end’- 2:1 ratio, ‘end of the season’/‘season’s end’ – 3.1 ratio, and the slightly less frequent ‘end of the war’/‘war’s end’ – 2:1 ratio).

One other fact which can be observed well here is the stark contrast between these examples and the use of forms with other, not so common, inanimate nouns (c.f. ‘turn of the century’/‘century’s turn’ with 334:1 ratio). More comments on some of the data in this table will be given the following section.

#### 4.2 Most frequent genitives across both registers

The final task is to list and examine all the aforementioned phrases from the corpus and cross-reference data on the frequency of their use across both registers - the phrases from the spoken register will be looked up in the newspaper register and vice versa in order to gather enough data to confirm or disprove the hypothesis established in the introduction: The ‘s genitive forms with inanimate nouns are used more frequently in the newspaper register than in the register of spoken language.

Findings will be presented in the form of tables, listing groups of phrases as they were already established above, but with slightly different sets of data focused more on comparison of the two registers and the most relevant data highlighted and positioned in the middle.



Table 3.1. Ten most frequent 's genitives initially identified in the spoken register (left) and their *of*-genitive alternatives (right) compared with their frequencies in the news register

#	'S genitive	Frequency SPOKEN	Frequency NEWS	Frequency NEWS	Frequency SPOKEN	Of-Alternative
1.	people's lives	553	339	37	85	lives of people
2.	nation's capital	399	296	10	5	capital of the nation
3.	people's minds	269	118	16	34	minds of people
4.	president's plan	264	60	0	1	plan of the president's
5.	president's speech	250	40	0	1	speech of the president
6.	women's health	230	264	8	4	health of women
7.	women's rights	211	304	37	42	rights of women
8.	child's life	125	78	14	9	life of a child
9.	governor's office	124	301	3	11	office of governor
10.	people's attention	118	56	5	8	attention of people

Table 3.2. Ten most frequent *of*-genitives initially identified in the spoken register (left) and their 's genitive alternatives (right) compared with their frequencies in the news register

#	Of-genitive	Frequency SPOKEN	Frequency NEWS	Frequency NEWS	Frequency SPOKEN	'S Alternative
1.	people of Iraq	198	71	3	4	Iraq 's people
2.	invasion of Iraq	165	168	81	43	Iraq 's invasion
3.	role of government	154	62	63	38	government 's role
4.	governor of California	148	47	8	21	California 's governor
5.	people of America	136	27	3	2	America 's people
6.	government of Iraq	126	25	14	21	Iraq 's government
7.	end of life	86	26	2	3	life 's end
8.	lives of people	85	37	339	553	people 's lives
9.	people of Haiti	80	9	1	2	Haiti 's people
10.	streets of Baghdad	76	29	8	1	Baghdad 's streets

Table 3.3. Ten most frequent 's genitives initially identified in the news register (left) and their *of*-genitive alternatives (right) compared with their frequencies in the spoken register

#	'S genitive	Frequency SPOKEN	Frequency NEWS	Frequency NEWS	Frequency SPOKEN	Of-Alternative
1.	children's hospital	240	428	13	6	hospital for children
2.	people's lives	553	339	37	85	lives of people
3.	women's rights	211	304	37	42	rights of women
4.	mayor's office	60	302	10	2	office of mayor
5.	nation's capital	399	296	10	5	capital of the nation
6.	women's health	230	264	8	4	health of women
7.	children's books	101	210	21	17	books for children
8.	father's death	69	127	54	14	death of his father
9.	nation's history	115	127	8	9	history of our nation
10.	children's health	89	123	8	4	health of children

Table 3.4. Ten most frequent *of*-genitives initially identified in the news register (left) and their 's genitive alternatives (right) compared with their frequencies in the spoken register.

#	Of-genitive	Frequency SPOKEN	Frequency NEWS	Frequency NEWS	Frequency SPOKEN	'S Alternative
1.	end of the year	669	825	378	40	year 's end
2.	end of the day	1738	657	72	41	day 's end
3.	turn of the century	216	335	1	0	century 's turn
4.	end of the season	51	321	104	2	season 's end
5.	end of the month	190	233	32	8	month 's end
6.	start of the season	2	166	6	0	season 's start
7.	capital of the world	105	151	2	1	world 's capital
8.	end of the world	211	151	4	2	world 's end
9.	end of the war	181	149	62	12	war 's end
10.	heart of the city	40	61	10	0	city 's heart

As is evident from Tables 3.1. and 3.3, constructions where both nouns are high on the gender list are most frequently used in the 's genitive form, while with constructions where one of the nouns is lower than the other, the form used will often depend on the speaker's / writer's subjective judgment of the phrase's personal characteristics, regardless of register.

This is most evident in Table 3.1 where the *of*-alternatives are barely used, and what little use they get is most commonly bound to the spoken register, i.e. specific situations. With phrases including nouns low on the gender list and related to popular subjects like the Middle East ('Iraq's invasion', 'government's role', 'Baghdad's streets' from Table 3.2.) and women's health and rights (Table 3.1., Table 3.3.) the 's construction is more common in the newspaper than in the spoken register, most likely because people get more and more familiar with the topics and shorter expressions are preferred for quick reference in the news.

What is most important to note from this overview is that according to table 3.4., the initial hypothesis about the news register using the 's construction with inanimate nouns more frequently than the spoken register has been proven true. By comparing the frequency values of the phrases between the two registers on the right side of the table, the values in the left column, representing the news register, surpass the right column's values from top to bottom, for all 10 phrases.

## 5. Conclusion

The starting point of this paper was to present a brief overview of the genitive forms and illustrate the variety of genitive construction in the English language. After briefly outlining our theoretical background, the focus shifted towards analyzing the two forms of the genitive expression using the examples collected from The Corpus of Contemporary American English. Our hypothesis was that the 's genitive forms with inanimate nouns are used more frequently in the newspaper register than in the register of spoken language which, on the one hand, flies in the face of the perhaps overstated theoretical affinity between 's genitives and animate nouns and on the other, highlights the importance of looking into other, specifically communicative, factors to explain naturally occurring data. Our data confirmed the initial hypothesis, suggesting that various communicative pressures (for shortness, compactness and efficiency of data presentation) allow us to bend the time-honored rules about the use of the genitive in an effort to become more efficient communicators.

## 6. Bibliography

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The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Mark Davies. June 2012. Brigham Young University. 5 August 2014 < <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>>