

# НИ ХУЯ СЕБЕ! RUSSIAN GENITIVE IV

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## 1 Introduction: the many Russian genitives

The purpose of this note is to signal the existence of yet another secondary genitive case in Russian: the “genitive of extreme”, which I will be referring to as *genitive IV* for reasons that will become clear below. The exhaustive (to the best of my knowledge) list of environments where genitive IV appears is illustrated in (1), with stress indicated where relevant, as it is the stress pattern that distinguishes genitive IV from the regular genitive:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. Ne sdelano {ni čertá/ ni xrená}.  
not done.NSG NEG devil.GEN<sub>IV</sub> NEG horseradish.GEN<sub>IV</sub>  
*Fuck-all has been done.*

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**Acknowledgments:** Many people have provided judgments for this work, whom I will not name here, so as not to embarrass them in public by attributing to them the socially questionable expertise that I profited from. Many thanks also to Carson Schütze and an anonymous reviewer who have contributed greatly to the clarification of this article, and to David Pesetsky for inspiration and support, always.

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, (1c,d) mean ‘to what purpose’ rather than ‘why’, representing an emphatic equivalent of the conventional *začem* ‘to what purpose’. The same is true for their accusative equivalent in (9b).

- b. Ostalos' eščë {do figá/ do xerá} bananov.  
 remained.NSG still until FIG.GEN<sub>IV</sub> until dick.GEN<sub>IV</sub> bananas.GEN  
*There remained still one hell of a lot of bananas.*
- c. {Na figá/ na xujá} tebe èto nužno?  
 on FIG.GEN<sub>IV</sub> on prick.GEN<sub>IV</sub> you.DAT this necessary.NSG  
*Why the fuck do you need this?*
- d. S {figá/xujá/xrená} li rasstraivat'sja?  
 on FIG.GEN<sub>IV</sub>/prick.GEN<sub>IV</sub>/dick.GEN<sub>IV</sub> WH.COMP get.upset.INF  
*Why the fuck get upset?*

The inventory of Russian cases is an extremely complex and thorny issue, with different authors coming to different conclusions. I will limit myself here to the discussion of genitive, which can be argued to serve as an umbrella term for at least four different underlying case specifications. The first one (genitive I) is the straightforward adnominal genitive, also used with a number of genitive-assigning verbs and on non-specific direct objects under negation (see Kagan 2013), as illustrated in (2). The so-called genitive II (Trubetzkoy 1934, Jakobson 1936/1971, 1958/1984), also referred to as partitive, is a secondary (i.e., minor) case, which is only distinguishable on a closed class of masculine singular nouns. Its use is limited to a subset of genitive environments, it is recognizable by the ending *-u* rather than the standard genitive *-a* and it can always be replaced with the regular genitive (3). The third Russian genitive (a partial case, like partitive) does not have the illustrious privilege of having been recognized by Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, yet I believe (see also Mel'čuk 1980, 2006) that it should be distinguished as a separate case on both syntactic and morphological grounds. The putative Russian genitive III is used with cardinals (4a) and its defining syntactic property is its disappearance in oblique cases, where the lexical NP combining with the cardinal no longer surfaces in the genitive case, but rather in the oblique case assigned to the numeral NP as a whole (4b). While in general genitive III is identical to the regular genitive, on a number of masculine measure nouns instead of the regular genitive plural ending *-ov*, expected in this declension class, the zero ending is used, which leads Mel'čuk 1985 to postulate the existence of a special adnumerative form in Russian.

- (2) a. doč' moego otc-a genitive I  
 daughter my.GEN father-GEN  
*my father's daughter*
- b. V čae xvataet saxar-a.  
 in tea suffice.3SG sugar-GEN  
*There is enough sugar in the tea.*
- (3) Xočeš' čaj-a/čaj-u? genitive II (partitive)  
 want.2SG tea-GEN/tea-PART  
*Would you like some tea?*
- (4) a. sem' angstrom-Ø/\*angstrom-ov genitive III (adnumerative)  
 seven angstroms-ADN/GEN  
*seven angstroms*
- b. o semi angstrom-ax/\*angstrom-Ø/\*angstrom-ov  
 about/of seven.LOC angstroms-LOC/ADN/GEN  
*about/of seven angstroms*

Yet another potential instance of a partial genitive case is the so-called paucal form. The lower cardinals *dva/dve* 'two.M/F', *tri* 'three', *četyre* 'four', the quantifier *oba/obe* 'both-M/F',

the fractions *poltorá/poltorý* ‘one and a half.M/F’, *četvert’* ‘quarter’ and the morphologically bound cardinal *pol-* ‘half’ appear with a morphologically singular lexical noun in the genitive case (in oblique case positions the corresponding plural oblique case is used). Two properties of the paucal form show that it must be distinguished from the regular genitive singular form: modifying APs appear in the plural (5) and for the handful of nouns listed in (6) the paucal form differs from the regular genitive singular in that it has final stress.<sup>2</sup>

- (5) *četyre staršix brata*  
four.NOM elder.PL.GEN brother.PAUC=SG.GEN  
*four elder brothers*

- (6) *čas* ‘hour’, *sled* ‘footstep’, *rjad* ‘row’, *šag* ‘step’ and marginally, *šar* ‘sphere, balloon’

Mel’čuk 2006 treats the paucal form as a special instance of adnumerative case. However, given the controversy as to whether the paucal form is a case (Mel’čuk 1985, Franks 1994, 1995, Corbett 2000:23fn., Rappaport 2002, 2003a, b, and Ionin and Matushansky 2006, [in prep.]) or a number (Yadroff 1999, Rakhlin 2003, Bailyn and Nevins 2008), I exclude it from consideration here.

All these genitive cases are partial in the sense that the unusual behavior is only shown by a subset of nouns, all masculine nouns of the second declension class. The same is true for genitive IV, which we will now examine in more detail.

## 2 Genitive IV: the core facts

The list of nouns that appear in the environments in (1) with final stress is given in (7); they are all monosyllabic.<sup>3</sup>

- (7) *čěrt* ‘devil’, *xuj* ‘prick’, *xer* ‘dick (originally, the name of the letter *x* of the Cyrillic alphabet)’, *xren* ‘horseradish’, *šiš* ‘an offensive gesture, where the thumb is inserted between the index and the middle finger’ (with negation only), *fig* ‘FIG’, *šut* ‘jester’

The lexical meaning of most lexical items in the list in (7) is completely bleached, and one of them, *fig*, has no further use except in those idiomatic expressions where it can replace other items in (7). Many (though not all) of them lack inherent stem accent, as shown by the fact that with accusative-assigning prepositions stress surfaces on the preposition (9) rather than on the stem (on Stress Retraction with Russian unaccented stems, see Halle 1973, 1997, Idsardi 1992, Ukiah 1998, Blumenfeld 2012):

- (8) a. *Fig/čěrt/šiš/xuj s toboj.*  
FIG/devil/trace/šiš/prick with you.INS  
*Do what you want, I don’t care!*

<sup>2</sup> Feminine surnames belonging to the pronominal declension also distinguish genitive singular and paucal forms (Franks 1995).

<sup>3</sup> The noun *sled* ‘trace, footstep’ appears with unexpected final stress under negation (*ni sledA* ‘not a trace’), yet its inclusion into the list in (7) would seem on the wrong track, since it is excluded from all other environments in (1) and can also bear final stress with the genitive-assigning preposition *bez* ‘without’ (*bez sledA* ‘without a trace’; if the meaning is not idiomatic, stress remains on the stem), the final stress in the collocation *na sledU* ‘following the prey [of dogs]’ (Gorbačevič 2014:374) is an instance of the so-called locative II. As *sled* ‘trace’ clearly does not fit into what would otherwise be described as a set of semantically bleached minimizers, I set it aside here.

- b. Fig/\*čert/šiš tebe.  
FIG/devil/trace/šiš you.DAT  
*You won't get anything.*
- (9) a. pó xuj/fig                      b. ná xuj/fig?                      c. né fig  
up.to prick/FIG                      on prick/FIG                      not FIG  
*of no bloody importance                      why the hell?                      for no bloody reason*

Given that the second declension genitive case ending *-a* is inherently unaccented (Halle 1997), the lack of an inherent accent on the root in (1) should have led to initial stress on the noun itself (cf. *góroda* 'city.GEN') or, in the presence of a preposition, to Stress Retraction (cf. *zá gorod* 'in the countryside, lit., beyond city.ACC'). Since neither happens, it must be concluded that the case ending in (1) is inherently accented and therefore cannot be the same as the regular second declension genitive. There are also no reasons to assimilate genitive IV to the paucal form: the nouns listed in (6) do not, with the possible exception of *sled* 'trace' (see fn. 3), appear in the environments in (1), and those listed in (7), with the same exception, do not take the stress-final form with paucal cardinals (needless to say, when combining with the paucal cardinals these nouns are no longer semantically impoverished):

- (10) a. Ne sdělano ni šága/\*šagá.  
NEG done.NSG NEG step.GEN/GEN<sub>IV</sub>=PAUC  
*Not a single step was made.*
- b. dva čerta/\*čertá                      c. tri xrená/\*xrená  
two devil.GEN/PAUC                      three horseradish.GEN/PAUC  
*two devils                      three horseradish roots*

An interesting twist to the story is the accentual behavior of *šut* 'jester', which is a post-accenting stem in its regular use and as such does not provide any independent evidence for genitive IV. Interestingly, however, it surfaces with stress on the stem (11) when preceded by *kakogo* 'what' (on which more below), but also with the preposition *k* 'towards' (Zarva 2001, Es'kova 2014:450). In other words, the behavior of *šut* 'jester' suggests that the semantic impoverishment that the nouns in (7) undergo correlates with phonological bleaching: stem stress is removed.

- (11) a. Kakogo šúta?  
what.A.GEN jester.GEN  
*Why the hell?!*
- b. Pošli oni k šútu/čertu!  
go.PAST.PL they towards jester.DAT/devil.DAT  
*May they go to the devil!*

The PP in (11) represents the pragmatic equivalent of (14a); while the environment in (14a) accepts exclusively inanimate nouns from the list in (7), the environment in (11) admits only the two animate nouns in it. This suggests that, even though the lexical items in (7) are phonologically and semantically impoverished, at least some of their formal features remain intact. Besides affecting the compatibility of the nouns in the list in (7) with the directional prepositions *na* 'on' and *k* 'towards', where the selection of the preposition could be claimed to be purely semantic, it is highly likely that it is animacy that precludes the appearance of *šut* 'jester' and *čert* 'devil' in the environments in (9).

Two questions arise: (1) what is the formal source of genitive IV, and (2) can genitive IV be treated not as a separate, albeit partial, case but rather as arising from the special properties of the list of words that it appears on?

Three out of the four environments in (1) contain a functional head that is independently known to assign genitive case: negation in (1a) (cf. (12a)) and the prepositions *do* ‘until’ and *s* ‘off’ in (1b,d) (as in (12b,c), respectively). However, the preposition *na* ‘on’ in (1c) does not normally assign genitive case, as illustrated by (13), where # indicates ungrammaticality due to semantic anomaly.

- (12) a. Ne sdelano ni jednoj ošibki. regular prepositional genitive  
not done.NSG NEG one.GEN mistake.GEN  
*Not a single mistake has been made.*
- b. rasstojanie ot zabora do kolodca  
distance from fence.GEN until well.GEN  
*the distance between the fence and the well*
- c. Slezaj s divana.  
get.off.IMP from couch.GEN  
*Get off the couch.*
- (13) a. Položi na stol. case patterns of the preposition *na* ‘on’  
place.IMP on table.ACC  
*Place it on the table.*
- b. Položi na stole.  
place.IMP on table.LOC  
*Place it somewhere on the table.*
- c. #Na stola?!  
on table.GEN  
*#Why the table [has this happened]?!*

That under no circumstances can *na* ‘on’ be treated as the source of genitive IV becomes even clearer once we realize that with a subset of the nouns in (7) *na* ‘on’ can also be used to derive a similar range of meanings, but with accusative case. While in one environment (14a) genitive IV is impossible, in the other two (14b,c) the two cases seem to be in free variation. I have been unable to detect any difference between these two variants, yet it is symptomatic that other accusative-assigning prepositions in (9) do not allow the genitive IV variant.

- (14) a. Idi ná fig/xuj/xer/\*šiš, etc.!  
go on FIG/prick/dick/šiš.ACC=NOM  
*Go to hell!*
- b. Ná fig/xuj/xer/xren/\*šiš, etc. ona uexala?  
on FIG/prick/dick/horseradish/šiš.ACC=NOM she left  
*Why the hell did she leave?*
- c. Na figá/xujá/xerá/xrená/?šišá, etc. ona uexala?  
on FIG/prick/dick/horseradish/šiš.GEN<sub>IV</sub> she left  
*Why the hell did she leave?*

The contrast between (14b) and (14c) indicates that genitive IV, like genitive of negation, overrides accusative. However, while genitive of negation can only override structural cases, genitive IV clearly can also override the inherent directional accusative assigned by *na* ‘on’. In other words, hypothesizing that (14b) represents the basic variant and (14c) has something

added to it that results in the emergence of genitive IV, we must conclude that it is not only structural cases that can be overridden in that way.<sup>4</sup>

An alternative hypothesis would be that something happens to the preposition *na* ‘on’ that enables it to assign genitive IV. Evidence against this alternative comes from the preposition *do* ‘until’ (15), which can, for some speakers and a subset of the lexical items in (7), yield the meaning of “high quantity” without genitive IV. In the general case, stress on the stem (15b) is possible with the unbleached meaning only, but for the noun *čěrt* ‘devil’ some speakers allow stem stress also with the meaning of high quantity (note the morphologically related expression *do čertikov* = until devil.DIM.PL, with the same interpretation, as well as a few other nouns that can be used with the same meaning: *dó smerti* ‘to death’, *do upádu* ‘to a fall’, etc.). For some speakers it is also possible to achieve the “high-quality” interpretation with Stress Retraction (15a) (% indicates inter-speaker variation, # is used when only the unbleached meaning is possible):

- |         |  |    |   |    |  |
|---------|--|----|---|----|--|
| (15) a. | % <i>dó figa</i><br>% <i>dó čerta</i><br>% <i>dó xuja</i><br>* <i>dó xrena</i> | b. | * <i>də figa</i><br><i>də čěrtá</i><br>% <i>də xúj</i><br># <i>də xrěna</i> | c. | <i>də figá</i><br>% <i>də čěrtá</i><br><i>də xujá</i><br><i>də xrená</i> |
|---------|--|----|---|----|--|

The availability of stress-retracted variants (diagnosing the regular genitive), along with the fact that no speaker allows the stress-retracted variants only, supports the hypothesis that genitive IV does indeed combine with other case features, here with the genitive assigned by the preposition itself.

The fact that the prepositions *na* ‘on’ and *do* ‘until’ can combine with the bleached nouns in (7) without the latter surfacing in genitive IV shows clearly that genitive IV does not come from the prepositions themselves. On the assumption that particular exponents are used for specific features or combinations of features, it must be concluded that genitive IV spells out a particular feature (formal or semantic, in isolation or in combination with other features) that is not provided by the prepositions, negation or even the lexical items in (7) themselves. To account for this feature, the four environments in (1) can be tentatively hypothesized to share some sort of reference to the extreme: (1a) is minimizing, while (1b) is maximizing and (1c,d) express a high degree of surprise/unexpectedness mixed with disapproval (see below). Yet as (14b) and (14c), or (15a) and (15c), would not seem to differ from each other in any way other than in case, the question of what feature is involved and how it is structurally represented must for now remain open.

### 3 The theory of multiple genitives

Hypothesizing the existence of genitive IV does not go beyond a description; the question arises why, in addition to the regular genitive case, as many as four additional variations on the same theme (partitive, adnumerative, paucal and genitive IV) can be argued for.

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<sup>4</sup> The directional accusative may itself be amenable to the same analysis, since it alternates with the locative case for the prepositions *na* ‘on’ and *v* ‘in’, and with the instrumental case with the prepositions *za* ‘behind’ and *pod* ‘under’. See Neidle 1988 and Franks 1995 for some discussion.

The adnumerative genitive discussed above may represent another instance of a non-structural case overridden by external case-assignment: there does not seem (contra Babby 1987, Franks 1994, 1995, Rappaport 2002) to be any evidence for treating the case assigned by cardinals as structural. Yet another is the case assigned by the Russian preposition *pod* ‘under’ (locative or accusative), which disappears in the double preposition *iz-pod* (see Matushansky 2016).

I believe that the answer lies in considering how, from the theoretical perspective, the feature responsible for genitive IV interacts with other case features. One possibility is that this feature (henceforth, [GEN<sub>IV</sub>]) overrides prior case-assignment, as suggested by Pesetsky 2013 for the interaction between nominative (which Pesetsky assumes to be assigned by D°) and genitive (which Pesetsky hypothesizes to be the case corresponding to N°, i.e., the case that nouns have by default): the case feature assigned latest is assumed to be the one spelled out. This naturally entails that the head responsible for the assignment of [GEN<sub>IV</sub>] is merged very high, even higher than negation in (1a). The alternative that I will argue for would be the hypothesis (Jakobson 1958/1984, Matushansky 2012) that cases are bundles of features rather than atomic features and the realization of this bundle depends on the totality of case features assigned. Two considerations speak in favor of the latter view.

On the one hand, the very existence of the different variants of the same case within one language is easy to account for, if each variant should correspond to a subtly different bundle of case features, most of which are shared between the variants. The prevailing syncretism of these variants for most nouns would be an argument for such shared features, as proposed by Jakobson 1958/1984, Neidle 1988, Franks 1995, Matushansky 2012, etc.

On the other hand, the interaction between genitive IV and the other cases assigned to the nouns in question is itself suggestive. Specifically, it is only in combination with the two least marked cases of the paradigm, nominative and accusative, that genitive IV surfaces, which would be unexpected on the assumption that the case assigned last wins.

I conclude with a striking and fascinating puzzle. To set up the stage, the accusative *čto* ‘what’ can in colloquial speech be sometimes replaced with the genitive *čego* ‘what’ without any change in meaning (albeit with some nuances added, most palpably, disapproval). This replacement is possible in some direct object positions (16a), but also when *čto* ‘what’ is interpreted as ‘why’ (16b) (see Munaro and Obenauer 1999, 2002, Obenauer 2005 for the use of ‘what’ in this sense in the Pagotto dialect of Italian, in German and in French; Dutch also allows it, although in a more limited set of environments).

- (16) b. *Čto/čego*                      *tebe*                      *nado?*  
           what.ACC=NOM/GEN    you.DAT    necessary  
           *What do you need?*
- a. *Čto/čego*                      *ty*                      *ne*                      *spiš’?*  
           what.N.ACC=NOM/GEN    you                      NEG                      sleep.2SG  
           *Why are you not sleeping?*

As examples in (17) demonstrate, in these environments *čto* ‘what’ can be replaced with the genitive-marked combination of *kakoj* ‘what’ and an expressive noun from the list in (7), as well as by the nouns *djávol* ‘devil’, *bes* ‘devil’ and *ljad* ‘dial. devil; (most native speakers are not aware of the meaning of the word, considering *ljad* a cranberry morph)’. I contend that despite the fact that the stress remains on the stem here, this surface genitive case still corresponds to genitive IV, given that the dedicated morphological realization of Russian secondary cases is known to resist modification (Franks 1995:58, fn. 36; cf. Blumenfeld 2012 on the effect of modification on Stress Retraction).<sup>5</sup>

- (17) a. *Kakogo*                      *čërta/xuja/xerá/djávola/xréna*                      *tebe*                      *nado?*  
           what.A.GEN    devil/prick/dick/devil/horseradish.GEN    you.DAT    necessary  
           *What the hell do you need?*

<sup>5</sup> Further evidence for the same view comes from the fact that final stress is claimed to be marginally possible in *kakogo xujá* ‘why the hell’ (Mixajlin 2005). I have not been able to find speakers that allow this.



- b. Kakogo čërta/xuja/xerá/djávola/xréna ty ne spiš'?'  
 what.A.GEN devil/prick/dick/devil/horseradish.GEN you NEG sleep.2SG  
*Why the hell are you not sleeping?*
- (18) a. \*Kakoj čërt/xuj/xer/djavol/xren tebe nado?  
 what.A devil/prick/dick/devil/horseradish.ACC=NOM you.DAT necessary
- b. \*Kakoj čërt/xuj/xer/djávola/xren ty ne spiš'?'  
 what.A devil/prick/dick/devil/horseradish.ACC=NOM you NEG sleep.2SG

Two interrelated questions arise. One is why accusative case-marking on the expressive *wh*-expressions is impossible, in either the adjunct or the direct object environments (18)? In other words, why can such replacement only occur for genitive case-marking? Secondly, with which predicates are the accusative and genitive *čto* 'what' interchangeable? How does the genitive option interact with the colloquial reduced variant *čo* 'what'? As shown by examples (19), the predicate in question does not have to assign genitive case itself (the verb *delat'* 'to do' assigns accusative only, and then only to a cognate object), nor is the ability to assign genitive case to the direct object decisive (the verb *bojat'sja* 'to be afraid of', while assigning genitive (and, in Modern Russian, accusative), only combines with the adjunct use of 'what the devil'):

- (19) a. Čego/ kakogo čërta/xúja ty zdes' delaeš'?'  
 what.GEN/ which.GEN devil/prick.GEN you here do.2SG  
*What (the hell) are you doing here?*
- b. Čego/ kakogo čërta/xúja ty boiš'sja?  
 what.GEN/ which.GEN devil/prick.GEN you be.afraid.2SG  
*Why (the hell) are you afraid?/What (\*the hell) are you afraid of?*

I leave both questions for future research.

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