Objective and Subjective Genitives

To this point, there have been three uses of the Genitive Case. They are possession, partitive, and description. Many genitives which have been termed possessive, however, actually are not.

When a Genitive Case noun is paired with certain special nouns, the Genitive has a special relationship with the other noun, based on the relationship of a noun to a verb.

Many English and Latin nouns are derived from verbs. For example, the word “love” can be used either as a verb or a noun. Its context tells us how it is being used.

The patriot *loves* his *country*.

The noun *country* is the Direct Object of the verb *loves*.

The patriot has a great *love* of his *country*.

The noun *country* is still the object of loving, but now loving is expressed as a noun. Thus, the genitive phrase of his country is called an *Objective Genitive*.
You have actually seen a number of Objective Genitives. Another common example is

Rex *causam itineris* docuit.
The king explained the cause of the journey
(the thing that *caused* the *journey*).

Because “cause” can be either a noun or a verb, when it is used as a noun its Direct Object must be expressed in the Genitive Case.

A number of Latin adjectives also govern Objective Genitives. For example,

Vir miser *cupidus pecuniae* est.
A miser is *desirous of money*.

Some special nouns and adjectives in Latin take Objective Genitives which are more difficult to see and to translate. The adjective *peritus*, -a, -um, meaning “skilled” or “experienced,” is one of these:

Nautae sunt *periti navium*.
Sailors are *skilled in ships* (i.e., Sailors have experienced *ships*)
Some of the most common Latin nouns govern Objective Genitives; therefore you will need to adjust to this new case function, because you are accustomed to calling these Genitives possessive.

*Rex Italorum* multa bella gerebat.

The *king* of the *Italians* waged many wars.
   [ruler; *rex*, *regis*, m. is derived from *rego*, *regere*]

*Dux peditum* impetum in castris jussit.

The *general* of the *infantry* ordered an attack against the camp.
   [leader; *dux*, *ducis*, m. is derived from *duco*, *ducere*]

*Imperator castelli* copias dedere nolebat.

The *commander* of the *garrison* was unwilling to surrender troops.
   [imperator, *imperatoris*, m. is derived from *impero*, *imperare*]
A special noun which contains the idea of an action is *facultas*, *facultatis*, f., “ability.” Because it is derived from the verb *facio*, *facere*, this noun also takes an Objective Genitive:

Spartacus magnam facultatem pugnae habebat. Spartacus had a great *ability in fighting* (*i.e.*, Spartacus was able to *do fighting*).

The *Subjective Genitive* is similar, but its relationship to the special “action” noun is that of being the *subject* of the action implied or stated in the special noun:

*Adventus Caesaris* civibus nuntiatus est.  
The *arrival of Caesar* was announced to the citizens.  
[Who arrived? Caesar *arrived.*]  
*aventus*, -us, m. is derived from *advenio*, -ire

*Nuntius victoriam Gallorum nuntiavit.*  
The messenger announced the *victory of the Gauls*.  
[Who conquered? The Gauls *conquered.*]  
*victoria*, -ae, f. is derived from *vinco*, -ere
Special Notes about Objective and Subjective Genitives

1. The Objective Genitive names the Direct Object of the action contained in another *noun*.

2. Certain adjectives commonly take an Objective Genitive because the meaning of the adjective is related to a verb’s action.

3. The Subjective Genitive names the Subject of the action contained in another *noun*.

4. Do not assume that an English apostrophe always indicates possession: *The arrival of Caesar* is the same thing as *Caesar’s arrival*!

Quiz #21: Vocabulary words in the Words to Master list on Page 113.