

## Intensional Genitive Case and Existential Commitment

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In this paper, I investigate the semantics of Intensional Genitive Case in Russian, a phenomenon whereby objects of certain intensional verbs appear in genitive Case, as is exemplified in (1). Intensional Genitive is licensed, for example, by the verbs *ždat'* (wait for), *zasluživat'* (deserve), *trebovat'* (demand), *prosit'* (ask for), etc. The same verbs can also take accusative objects (2). Still, the choice of Case is dependent on a number of semantic properties. For instance, the genitive tends to be assigned to non-specific, indefinite, narrow scope NPs and to NPs that lack existential commitment (EC) (Neidle 1988, Bailyn 2004, Kagan 2005). At the same time, none of these properties is sufficient to account for the genitive/accusative alternation. Thus, the object NP in (2) is most likely to receive a narrow scope, non-specific interpretation and to lack EC; still, it is obligatorily accusative.

I propose that the assignment of Intensional Genitive is indeed dependent on EC. However, in order to capture the Case-assignment pattern, this notion has to be appropriately modified. I introduce a distinction between *Absolute Existential Commitment* (AEC) and *Relative Existential Commitment* (REC), formalized in (3). AEC is EC in the traditional sense of the term, i.e. a commitment that an NP quantifies over a non-empty set in the actual world. REC is a commitment to existence in the actual world or in any alternative possible world that stands to it in an accessibility relation introduced in the sentence. (Such a relation may be introduced by an intensional verb. For instance, I assume, following Heim 1992, that such intensional verbs as *think* and *want* introduce an accessibility relation to the set of worlds that represents the worldview of their subject.) Essentially, REC is commitment to existence in those possible worlds about which an assertion is being made in the sentence, or relative to which the sentence contains presuppositions. In (3) all such worlds are subsumed under the set  $W^s$ . Importantly, an NP may lack EC relative to the actual world but carry EC relative to other worlds. I propose that Intensional Genitive is only licensed in the absence of REC.

I further introduce a distinction between two types of sentences with intensional verbs under discussion: Location-Oriented and Instantiation-Oriented. Sentences of the former type assert that the subject wants/demands/waits etc. for an entity that she believes to exist to occupy the same location as herself. This is the state of affairs in (4). Lena wants for Dima to undergo a change of location. In contrast, Instantiation-Oriented sentences assert that the subject wants for an entity that does not currently exist in the world to come into existence. This is what happens in (1). Typically, object NPs in Location-Oriented sentences carry REC, whereas objects in Instantiation-Oriented ones do not. I will show that indeed, Intensional Genitive tends to be assigned in sentences of the latter but not of the former type. For instance, (2) is Location-Oriented; according to this sentence, Dima believes that mermaids exist and is waiting for one of the existing mermaids. As a result, only accusative Case is acceptable. In contrast, according to (1), Dima wants for the property *miracle* to be instantiated. He wants for the world to change in such a way that it would come to contain a new abstract object. REC is absent, and Intensional Genitive is assigned. As I will show, the restriction in (3) together with the distinction between Location-Oriented and Instantiation-Oriented sentences accounts for the Case-assignment pattern observed.

Finally, this analysis captures a parallel that holds between the genitive/accusative contrast in Case on the one hand and the subjunctive/indicative opposition in mood, on the other. According to Farkas (2003),

subjunctive mood is only licensed if the proposition contributed by a clause is neither entailed nor presupposed to be true. Again, such a commitment to truth must be absent not only relative to the actual world but also relative to the set of worlds introduced by the intensional predicate. Thus, the analysis of Intensional Genitive that I am proposing treats this Case as a counterpart of subjunctive mood within the nominal domain. This accounts for the fact that Intensional Genitive and subjunctive mood share numerous properties (Kagan 2005, Borshev et al. in press). For instance, Intensional Genitive is licensed only by those verbs that license the subjunctive. These intensional verbs are contrasted to ones that do not license subjunctive mood (e.g. *imagine*). As discussed by Farkas, the complement clause of verbs of the latter type is entailed to hold in the set of worlds introduced by the given verb (i.e. the embedded context set). As a result, the subjunctive is unacceptable. I argue that these verbs do not license Intensional Genitive either because their nominal complements, by analogy, carry REC relative to the same worlds.

1. Dima ždjot čuda / \*čudo.  
Dima wait miracle<sub>GEN SG/ACC SG</sub>  
Dima is waiting for a miracle.
2. Dima ždjot rusalku / \*rusalki.  
Dima waits mermaid<sub>ACC SG/GEN SG</sub>  
Dima is waiting for a mermaid.
3. Let S be a sentence with propositional content p. Let NP be a noun phrase that contributes the property P. Let  $w_0$  be the actual world. Let  $\otimes$  encode entailment and/or presupposition relation. Then:
 

An occurrence of an NP in S carries Absolute Existential Commitment iff  
 $p \sim \exists x P(x, w_0)$

An occurrence of an NP in S carries Relative Existential Commitment iff  
 $\exists w [w \in W^S \wedge p \sim \exists x P(x, w)]$

(where  $W^S$  is the set of all worlds such that an accessibility relation to these worlds is introduced in the sentence (e.g. by intensional operators))
4. Lena ždjot Dimu.  
Lena waits Dima<sub>ACC</sub>  
Lena is waiting for Dima.

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