

Mother's letter.
England's cheeses.
 The letter is from Mother.
 The cheeses were produced in England.

Cf The cheeses of England.

(g) Descriptive genitive:

Children's shoes.
The shoes are designed for children.
A *doctor's* degree.
The degree is a doctorate.

NOTE The distinction between (a), (b), and (c) is far from clear-cut and much depends on gender (*cf.* 5.51) and on contextual viewpoint. In general, the closer the relation can be seen to literal possession, the more suitable is the genitive; by contrast, attribution and partition are usually more appropriately expressed by the *of*-construction. Where both genitive and *of*-construction are grammatically possible, the decision often turns on the principle of end-focus or end-weight (18.5 and Note [a]):

My father's DEATH ~ The death of my FATHER
John's age ~ The age of my oldest and dearest friend

Gender and the genitive

5.51 The genitive is not used with all nouns equally but tends to be associated with those of animate gender, especially with those having personal reference (5.45*f*). For example:

The dog's name.
Segovia's most famous pupil.
The student's precious possession.
The committee's decision.

Geographical names take the genitive inflection, especially when they are used to imply human collectivity; thus *China's policy* more plausibly than *China's mountains*. So too with other strictly inanimate nouns when used with special relevance to human activity or concern: *The hotel's occupants* rather than *The hotel's furniture*, *The book's true importance* rather than *The book's colour*.

NOTE [a] The part played by personal gender in admitting the genitive is well illustrated by the indefinite pronouns:

I think I can see down there

{ the shadow of *somebody*,
somebody's shadow,
 the shadow of *something*,
 **something's* shadow.

[b] In some expressions, the genitive depends less on the noun so inflected than on the noun following. The items *edge* and *sake* are especially notable in this connection:

He stood at the water's edge.
She did it for her country's sake.

With *worth*, no *of*-variant is possible:

We must try to get our money's worth.

The grammatical status of the genitive

As determiner

5.52 For the most part, genitives function exactly like central definite determiners and thus preclude the cooccurrence of other determiners.

A new briefcase.
The new briefcase.
This new briefcase.
Joan's new briefcase.
 (**A* the new briefcase.)
 (**The* this new briefcase.)
 (**The* Joan's new briefcase.)

This equally applies when the genitive is a phrase incorporating its own determiner.

My cousin's new briefcase.
My handsome cousin's new briefcase.
 (\neq *My new briefcase.*)

In other words, items preceding the genitive relate to the inflected noun, such that a phrase like

That old gentleman's son

must be understood as 'The son of that old gentleman', and not as 'That son of the old gentleman.'

But an exception must be made where the preceding item is a predeterminer, since this may relate either to the genitive noun as in [1] or to the noun that follows as in [2]:

[1] We attributed *both the girls'* success to their hard work.
(ie the success of *both the girls*)

[2] Both *the girl's* parents were present.
(ie both the parents of *the girl*)

As modifier

5.53 Where the genitive is used descriptively (5.50(g)), however, it functions not as a determiner but as a modifier with a classifying role. Determiners in such noun phrases usually relate not to the genitive but to the noun following it, as can be plainly seen from the following, where the singular *a* could obviously not cooccur with the plural *women*:

They attend a *women's* university in Kyoto.

So also, other modifying items in the noun phrase are less likely to relate to the genitive noun than to the noun that follows it; thus in

She lives in a quaint old *shepherd's* cottage.

it is probably the cottage that is quaint and old, not the shepherd. Grammatically, some phrases can be ambiguous, though it would be rare for the context not to make the meaning clear: