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## ***THE CORAL OF YOUR LIPS, THE STARS OF YOUR EYES* — THE FUNCTION OF THE GENITIVE CASE IN A PARTICULAR KIND OF GENITIVE METAPHOR COMPARED TO OTHER SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS OF THIS CASE (BASED ON EXAMPLES IN THE POLISH LANGUAGE)**

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to explicate the meanings of expressions representing a specific type of genitive metaphor — binding two notions by the rule of conventional, surface sameness. This article aims to prove that the genitive function that appears in this kind of expression is part of a general pattern modelling the semantic roles of this case. This pattern presents the genitive as a lingual indicator of the relation between a “smaller range” object and a “larger range” object and explains the essence of the semantic function appearing not only in this particular type of genitive metaphor, but also in structures such as *genetivus definitivus*.

**Keywords:** genitive; semantic function of case; metaphor

The expressions referred to in the title of this paper represent a special kind of connection between two nouns. From the perspective of traditional syntax, the second noun in the Polish expressions *korale ust* (‘coral of lips’) and *gwiazdy oczu* (‘stars of eyes’), is a dependent element in the genitive case. It is the indicator of the main subject of the metaphor, that is to say the element referred to, among other terms, as the *tenor*, as opposed to the “auxiliary subject”, which can also be called the *vehicle* (Richards, 1936). This type of connotation is special, because it is based on a specific kind of syntactic relation between its components. The category of metaphors in question does not include metaphoric expressions (also recognized as so-called *genitive metaphors*<sup>1</sup>) such

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<sup>1</sup>A wariness towards the term genitive metaphor arises due to the possibility that it can be misleading. According to Wróblewski (1998), due to the analogy with the term genitive attribute, this name may be erroneously used to refer to collocations in which the genitive form is reserved for the modifier, whereas in the type of collocation under discussion in this paper, it is the subject of the metaphor which takes the genitive form.

as *morze pieniędzy* ('a sea of money'), *uśmiech losu* ('a smile of fortune'), *szorstkość dźwięku* ('roughness of sound') or catachreses such as *nogi stołu* ('legs of the table'), which are realisations of the following conceptual patterns:

- ACTION : SUBJECT (*uśmiech losu* — 'a smile of fortune', *śpiew drzew* — 'the singing of trees'),
- ACTION : OBJECT (*drenaż sił* — 'a drain of power', *zabijanie miłości* — 'the killing of love'),
- FEATURE : OBJECT (*chropowatość dźwięku* — 'roughness of sound', *słodycz życia* — 'sweetness of life'),
- QUANTITY : SUBSTANCE (*morze pieniędzy* — 'a sea of money', *ocean smutku* — 'an ocean of grief'),
- PART : WHOLE (*nogi stołu* — 'legs of the table', *jutrzenka życia* — 'dawn of life').

The structure of the collocations *korale ust* ('coral of lips') and *gwiazdy oczu* ('stars of eyes') is based on another pattern which will be presented later in the paper. The general properties of the analysed expressions will now be described.

Both examples can be classified as examples of metaphors *in praesentia*, as the notions corresponding to the main subjects (LIPS, EYES) are clearly stated (comp. Dobrzyńska, 1994). The expressions rank to nominal metaphors, as they imply the phrases *Lips are coral*, *Eyes are stars* (in Polish: *Usta są koralem*, *Oczy są gwiazdami*) constructed according to the typical rule of this kind of metaphor, i.e. "communicating about the sameness (more often — similarity) of two notions in some respect" (Żmigrodzki, 1994).

In order to analyse the structure of the type of metaphor in question, instead of the aforementioned conceptual patterns (e.g. ACTION : SUBJECT or FEATURE : OBJECT) a completely different universal pattern must be used: OBJECT X : OBJECT Y. This matches the syntactic model which in cognitive linguistics describes conceptual metaphors: OBJECT X is OBJECT Y. Mapping the analysed expressions onto this model produces the formulas: LIPS are CORAL, EYES are STARS.

The following study by no means claims to register or analyse of all possible types of genitive metaphors. It is merely an attempt to compare the role of the genitive segment in expressions like *coral of lips* with its role (or roles) as an analogous element in other types of genitive metaphor, as well as in other — non-metaphoric — nominal phrases, where a noun in the genitive form is subordinate. This goal requires the presentation — even if cursory — of the semantic structures of these "other" expressions, and definitions of these "other" semantic roles of the genitive.

The term *semantic role* is comprehended here as "a possible semantic relation<sup>2</sup>" (comp. Rudzka-Ostyn, 2000) between the components of expressions and it concerns the relation between elements of a phrase constructed according to the pattern  $N + N_{Gen}$ . The variety of genitive roles (described also as "semantic functions") has been examined before — this subject has been discussed for years by scholars representing various linguistic branches and schools. Adam Heinz, in particular, emphasises the diversity of adnominal genitive semantic function. He states that the genitive in Indo-European languages can "express all kinds [my emphasis — M.S.] of relations possible in general between two names of objects" (Heinz, 1955).

Heinz associates this diversity of roles with "syntactic multifunctionality". He substantiates it by enumerating the syntactic functions of the genitive — capable of assuming the position of

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<sup>2</sup>This is how the author defines the scope of the term she uses in the description of the semantic roles of a case (in general) in language expressions in the form of sentences. This is why she writes about „possible semantic relations between nominal components and verbal predicate or whole valent frame of predicate" (Rudzka-Ostyn, 2000). However, this term may also be related to the adnominal use of a case (here — genitive), that is to say to its function in a nominal group  $N + N_{Gen}$ .

subject, object (direct and indirect), and adverbial (he lists several types here) (Heinz, 1955). An alternative perspective of structuralistic attempts at describing the functions of the genitive can be found in the work of Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn. She seeks the conditions for the successful analysis of genitive semantics in “removing the opposition between syntax and semantics”. She considers this opposition to be “a methodological mistake”. Adopting methodology and nomenclature developed by cognitive grammar (she refers — among others — to the work of Ronald Langacker and Leonard Talmy), Rudzka-Ostyn presents the semantic and functional complexity of the genitive, stressing “accidental meanings” typical of this case and defining them as groups of mutually connected notions (Rudzka-Ostyn, 2000).

By describing the “quantifying”, “partitive” and “possessive” uses of the genitive, on one hand the author highlights their distinctive properties, and on the other she emphasises their mutual relations and identifies the source of this affinity as a single, ‘higher’, function of the genitive, which *par excellence* indicates a dependence: it binds one object to another to define (limit) its scope (Rudzka-Ostyn, 2000). This observation makes it possible to describe the specific semantic role of the genitive — emerging in collocations like *coral of lips* or *stars of eyes*, i.e. in expressions — as mentioned before — representing a special kind of so-called genitive metaphor. Rudzka-Ostyn does not consider this use of the genitive in her analysis, but the methodology proposed by her, as well as the conclusions, have proved to be — from the perspective of the current paper — not only inspiring, but also very useful.

An analysis of relations between the components of various kinds of metaphoric expression with a genitive noun reveals examples of many functions of this case — in addition to the functions presented in the cited study: “quantifying”, “partitive” and “possessive”. For example, in the metaphorical expression *morze pieniędzy* (‘sea of money’), analogous to “non-metaphoric” expressions like *tona piasku* (‘a ton of sand’) or *litr mleka* (‘a litre of milk’), we can observe an occurrence of “quantifying” function, in the catachresis *nogi stołu* (‘legs of the table’) or the metaphor *serce miasta* (‘heart of the city’) — a “partitive” function, the same as the one present in non-metaphoric collocations as *drzwi samochodu* (‘door of the car’) or *dach budynku* (‘roof of the building’). Such analogies can be listed almost *ad infinitum*, but they should only be a point of reference, a background, whereas our main goal is to present the function of the genitive in expressions which serve as the basis for constructing existential, predicative sentences with *to be*, and which embody the structure: *X is Y* (*stars of eyes* — *eyes are stars*). Semantic-syntactic relations between the segments of metaphoric expressions, such as *sea of money*, *heart of the city*, *flavour of life*, do not provide this opportunity — instead of X is Y pattern other ones appear here: X is the measure of the amount of Y, X is a part of Y, X is a feature of Y. It is in the background that the relations to notions are revealed. In the superficial structure of metaphor they do not find any indicator — e.g., the expression *heart of the city* is based on a conceptual metaphor, THE CITY IS A LIVING CREATURE, with the concept of LIVING CREATURE not referred to directly, but *via* an element: *heart*. However, in expressions like *stars of eyes* both notions connected by the rule of metaphor are referred to in a direct manner.

It is important that the type of metaphoric expressions described here, as opposed to other genitive metaphors, is a part of a pattern reserved *only* for metaphors. Other patterns — such as PART — WHOLE or FEATURE — OBJECT — are the basis for metaphoric  $N + N_{Gen}$  expressions (*nogi stołu* — ‘legs of the table’, *szorstkość dźwięku* — ‘roughness of sound’) as well as for non-metaphoric ones (*nogi kobiety* — ‘legs of the woman’, *szorstkość podłoga* — ‘roughness of the floor’), whereas the pattern assuming (in a sense) the identity of X and Y elements (X which is Y) can be realised only as metaphoric expressions, that is to say expressions which let one comprehend the given matter in terms of another (comp. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Therefore, if the components of an  $N + N_{Gen}$  expression are nouns referring to two different notions (X i Y) and the one and only semantic relation between these components can be expressed as the sentence X is Y, then the  $N + N_{Gen}$  expression can only be a metaphor.

The underlined fragment above is particularly important and the “difference” between X and Y should be clarified. If this *sui generis* rule was used for non-metaphoric expressions such as

*zabieg endoskopii* (‘a procedure of an endoscopy’) or *uczucie miłości* (‘emotion of love’), it could be rashly stated that these expressions are metaphoric (which is clearly untrue) or that the rule is unreliable. However, these expressions meet — only seemingly — one of the conditions: sentences like *Endoskopia jest zabiegiem* (*Endoscopy is a procedure*) and *miłość jest uczuciem* (*Love is an emotion*) can be built upon them. There is no deviation in their structure (on any level), but, firstly, these sentences are built at variance with the rule — the positions of the subject and the predicative noun are switched. In the expressions *zabieg endoskopii* (‘a procedure of an endoscopy’) and *uczucie miłości* (‘emotion of love’), *zabieg* and *uczucie* correspond to the element marked as X, while *endoskopia* (‘an endoscopy’) and *miłość* (‘a love’) are the components marked by Y. Hence, sentences built according to the rule should take the following forms: *\*Zabieg jest endoskopią* (*\*Procedure is endoscopy*) and *\*Uczucie jest miłością* (*\*Emotion is love*). Secondly, the mutual relation between the notions forming the pair PROCEDURE and ENDOSCOPY (similarly with EMOTION and LOVE) does not allow one to consider them as “different” notions in the way this term was used before. The lexical units co-forming nominal phrases such as *zabieg endoskopii* (‘a procedure of an endoscopy’) and *uczucie miłości* (‘emotion of love’) remain in hyperonymic relation with each other, according to structural semantics. (The word *zabieg* — ‘a procedure’ — is a hyperonym of the word *endoskopia* — ‘an endoscopy’; *uczucie* — ‘an emotion’ is a hyperonym of *miłość* — ‘love’). Therefore, the components in the NGen position are examples of genitive specific semantic and syntactic functions. It is *genetivus definitivus*. The role of the genitival segment in these expressions is played by a lexical unit. Its semantic range is contained in the semantic range of the unit placed in the superordinate position.

*Genetivus definitivus* is a type of structure, in which the specific semantic and syntactic functions/roles of the genitive are realised, only seemingly identical to its function in the metaphoric expressions relevant to this paper, i.e. of  $N + N_{Gen}$  type and presenting notion Y in the categories of notion X.

Henceforth, the study will focus on the differences between the specific functions of the “metaphoric” genitive and the other semantic roles of this case. The paper will try to demonstrate that the function in question — marginalised, or even omitted, in traditional analysis of the diversity of genitive functions — is a part of the general pattern of this case’s higher role, consisting of, as was quoted before, binding one object with another to define (limit) its scope (Rudzka-Ostyn, 2000).

Many researchers have discussed the genitive case — as well as other grammatical cases — from the cognitive perspective. Aside from the aforementioned works of Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn, the studies of Laura Janda on the case system in Slavic languages should also be referred to (e.g. Janda, 1997, 1999, 2002). She states that “the cases of any given Slavic language serve as an enormously powerful yet austere system, enabling users to express all possible relationships they might experience” (Janda, 2002). The role of the genitive, according to her, is to indicate “a source (withdrawal); a goal (approach); a whole (possession/‘of’, quantification); a reference (lack, comparison, near)” (Janda, 2002).

In their studies, neither Rudzka-Ostyn nor Janda considers the role of the genitive in metaphorical expressions similar to the ones discussed in this paper. However, some of their observations are related to the results of the semantic analysis of such expressions. It is particularly notable when Janda describes the genitive as the case used to express “reference” and “comparison”. Indeed, the genitive case functions like this in the type of metaphor analysed in this paper.

Using cognitive methodology, one can interpret these metaphoric expressions in the categories of figure/ground organisation. How is this organisation reflected in the metaphors *koral ust* (‘coral of lips’), *gwiazdy oczu* (‘stars of eyes’) or *teatr świata* (‘theatre of the world’)? To isolate a figure from the ground means to separate a “part” from a larger “whole”. It is a mechanism strongly related to the semantic and syntactic functions of the genitive. It emerges in — among other things — quantification (*butelka wody* — ‘bottle of water’ — is an isolated portion of a substance) or broadly defined possessiveness (*ogon psa* — ‘tail of the dog’ — is a part of the body).

It is appropriate to attribute the status of figure to the superordinate segments of the expres-

sions *koral ust* ('coral of lips') or *teatr świata* (theatre of the world'), while the status of ground is attributed to the genitive segments. The element *koral* ('a coral') does not refer in fact to "coral being lips", but to this bundle of lips' features (color, but also shape) — isolated from the ground, that causes their appearance to bring coral to mind. The expression *koral ust* ('coral of lips') means in other words "that which lips have of coral/that which of coral is in the lips", and *gwiazdy oczu* ('stars of eyes') — "that which makes eyes look like stars" (glitter, shape). *Teatr świata* ('theatre of the world') depicts the world by highlighting only some of its features (its typical phenomena) — namely those making it resemble a theatre (pretence, falseness, artificiality).

The expressions *corals of your lips* and *stars of your eyes* — quoted in the title of the paper and used as model examples of the analysed type of genitive metaphor — are characteristic of literary language.<sup>3</sup> However, metaphors constructed according to this pattern are present not only in artistic texts. For example, they are also to be found in newspapers and magazines, particularly to characterise social phenomena: *rak korupcji* ('the cancer of corruption'), *dżuma terroryzmu* ('the plague of terrorism'), *nowotwór ekstremizmu* ('the tumour of extremism').

Corpus-based analysis allows one to excerpt many examples of this type of metaphor from modern texts representing various genres and language styles. Resources of the National Corpus of the Polish Language show that among metaphors of this kind the most frequent are those describing:

- human feelings and experiences (individual or collective), e.g. *demon strachu* ('demon of fear'), *droga życia* ('way of life'), *pustynia życia* ('desert of life'), *studnia zapomnienia* ('well of oblivion'), *krzyż cierpienia*, ('cross of suffering'), *krzyż samotności* ('cross of loneliness'), *brzemie cierpienia* ('burden of suffering'), *brzemie odpowiedzialności* ('burden of responsibility'), *balast historii* ('ballast of history') *balast długów* ('ballast of debt'), *bagaż doświadczeń* ('baggage of experience');
- social situations and behaviours, e.g. *ogień dyskusji* ('fire of discussion'), *ogień polemiki* ('fire of polemic'), *brud kłamstw* ('filth of lies');
- social phenomena, e.g. the aforementioned: *rak korupcji* ('the cancer of corruption'), *dżuma terroryzmu* ('the plague of terrorism'), *nowotwór ekstremizmu* ('tumour of extremism') and also: *kajdany totalitaryzmu* ('fetters of totalitarianism'), *ogień konfliktu* ('fire of conflict'), *ogień wojny* ('fire of war');
- values (both positive and negative), e.g. *światło nadziei* ('light of hope'), *światło prawdy* ('light of truth'), *lek nadziei* ('medicine of hope'), *lek miłości* ('medicine of love'), *demon zła* ('demon of evil'), *sieć zła* ('net of evil').

The high productivity of patterns having specific notions as source domains can be observed, e.g. the pattern with the source domain FIRE: *fire of discussion*, *fire of argument*, *fire of questions*, *fire of criticism*, *fire of strife*, or the source domain BURDEN — the language corpus provides examples such as: *burden of debt*, *burden of responsibility*, *burden of the past*, *burden of history*.

The comparison of the analysed type of expressions with other kinds of metaphors or comparative structures suggests that the genitive metaphor is especially emphatic. It seems that the expression *dżuma terroryzmu* ('the plague of terrorism') stresses the similarity (in many respects) between the phenomenon and the lethal disease more forcibly than a metaphorical sentence *Terroryzm jest dżumą* ('Terrorism is the plague') or a comparative one *Terroryzm jest jak dżuma* ('Terrorism is like the plague').

Semantic analysis of the expressions quoted above, as well as other genitive metaphors of this kind which are present in the literature and language corpus, indicates that many of them are

<sup>3</sup>The metaphor *coral of lips* comes from Bolesław Lesmian's poem *Niebo przyćmione* (*The Dim Sky*) from the volume *Sad rozstajny* (*Bifurcated Orchard*), 1912. The expression *stars of eyes* can be found, for example, in Halina Poswiatowska's poem *Śpiący jednorożec* (*A Sleeping Unicorn*).

related to value appraisal. Expressions such as *corals of your lips* or *pearls of your teeth* serve not only to describe, but also to articulate an admiration for someone's beauty. The metaphor *light of truth*, referring to the cultural connotation of light (e.g. its religious symbolism), emphasizes a particular nature and significant status of truth in a general system of values. In contrast, the metaphors *filth of lies* or *net of evil* reflect an extremely negative attitude towards anti-values, because they equate them with something repugnant (*filth*) or with something that threatens human freedom (*net*).

The explications of the meanings of the specific metaphoric expressions presented above was aimed at defining the particular role the genitive case plays in them. This role amounts to strongly emphasising the similarities between the two compared (or even equated) elements of reality. At the same time, an attempt was made to prove that it is part of the general schema of the genitive case's semantic roles. This pattern presents the genitive as a lingual indicator of relation between a "smaller range" object and a "larger range" object and explains the essence of semantic function appearing not only in structures such as *genetivus definitives*, but also in the particular type of genitive metaphor which binds two notions by the rule of conventional, surface sameness which, in fact, is not sameness, but rather a relation based on the partial overlapping of conceptual domain ranges.

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