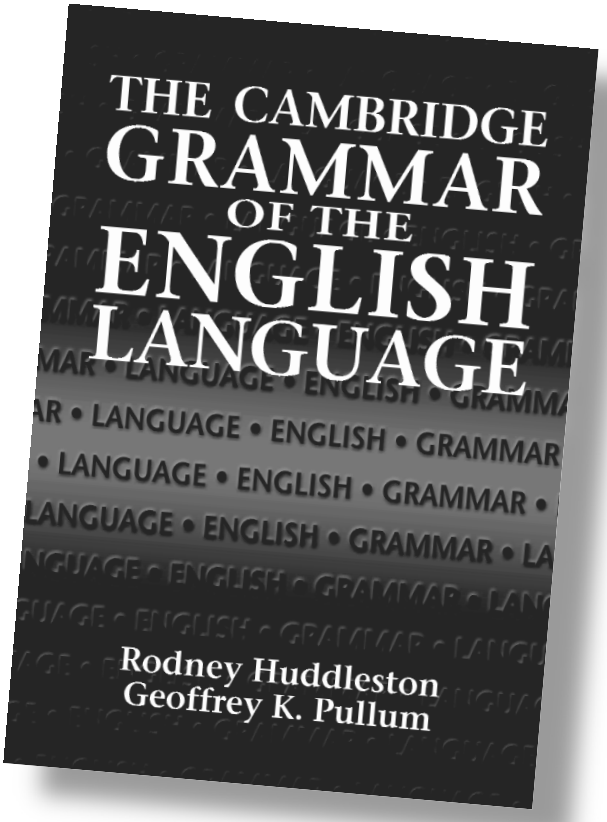
REVIEW

On the bare genitive

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The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (*CGEL*) by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum in collaboration with 13 other authors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) is the most comprehensive (over 1850 oversize pp.), authoritative, descriptive grammar of English ever published. In fact, it won the much coveted Leonard Bloomfield Prize in 2003 awarded by the Linguistic Society of America for the most significant linguistic work of the year. I concur that it is an important work – well written, impeccably organized, and full of insight into the structure of contemporary standard English. However, to use the old Sapirian adage, all grammars leak! This essay examines the remarks on what the authors refer to as the *bare genitive* (pp. 1595–1596) – one place with a small, conspicuous dribble.

According to *CGEL*, there are two types of genitives: the *'s genitive*, e.g., *dog's* and the *bare genitive*, e.g., *dogs'*. The former is considered to be the default genitive – always *-'s* in writing with the same allomorphic distributions after sibilants as the plural and present tense morphemes: *horses* [horsəz], *cats* [kæts], and *dogs* [dɔgz], and *dances* [dænsəz], *eats* [its], and *runs* [rʌnz] respectively. [*Note* I am using here an American English transcription for the British one in *CGEL*.] Thus we have *horse's* [horsəz], *cat's* [kæts], and *dog's* [dɔgz] respectively. The *bare genitive* is described by Huddleston and Pullum as having no realization in speech at all, but always containing *s'* in writing. Thus, the bare genitive *dogs'* [dɔgz] is always pronounced the same as the plural *dogs* [dɔgz], which just happens to coincide with the genitive singular *dog's* [dɔgz] as well. They further assert that the *bare genitive* 'is normally restricted to nouns ending in *-s*.' It is either obligatory or else optional with the *'s* genitive as a variant (p. 1,595). As examples, they note that *Jesus'* = *Jesus's*, *Jones'* = *Jones's*, etc. (*ibid*.). Although both of these are correct, it has been my experience that the former is by far the more common of the two. In speech, however, *Jesus' book* (or *Jesus's book*) is usually pronounced [jizəzəz bʊk], i.e., 'Where is Jesus' book?' Thus, the *bare genitive* does have a realization in speech; thus, Huddleston and Pullum's statement is erroneous. Moreover, it is also correct to say 'Where is Jesus' book?' without the [-əz], viz., [jizəz bʊk]. Similarly 'Where is Moses' house?' can be pronounced either [mozəz] or [mozəzəz].

The authors further stipulate that *Ross'* is sometimes encountered, but it is 'of questionable acceptability' (p. 1,596). In speech, 'Where is Ross's house?' is pronounced [rɔsəz] and not [rɔs]. Also, 'Where is Rose's [rozəz] house?' contrasts with 'Where is (the) Roses' [rozəzəz] house?' (a house owned by two or more women named Rose or owned by a Mr and Mrs Roses), or 'Where is the Roses' house?' (a house belonging to a Mr and Mrs Rose) with no ending – [rozəz], or as [rozəzəz].

The authors go on to affirm that 'the bare genitive is obligatory with plural nouns ending in *-s*, regular or irregular, including foreign plurals like *indices*' (p. 1596). I concur with their assertion that nouns like *species* take a bare

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genitive in the singular and the plural, and this applies to nouns like *chassis* too (*ibid*.). But then they go on to claim that 'the bare genitive is likewise the only possibility in more or less fixed phrases with *sake: for goodness'/convenience' sake* (the latter having spoken /s/ but not written /s/', *ibid*.). I do not agree with the last statement. Today's English allows only *for goodness sake* and *for convenience sake* (no genitive whatsover according to my American informants).

Let us now consider some morphologically and semantically parallel expressions with *sake*. First, there is *for Christ's sake*, which has a spoken (and probably written) variant without the genitive. So too the following: *for God('s) sake, for heaven(')s sake, for pity(')s sake, for crimineγ('s) sake,* and *for Pete('s) sake*. None of these aforementioned are reversible with the periphrastic *of*: **for the sake of Christ/God/heaven/pity/crimineγ/Pete*. Thus, we now observe the loss of the genitive marker in comparable expressions to *for goodness sake*; e.g., *for Christ sake*. In addition, one should note that English does not permit the following: **for Jesus(') sake*, **for Jesus Christ('s) sake*; **for Satan(')s sake*; **for (the) Devil(')s sake*; and so on.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that one can say *for the sake of convenience*, which has the same meaning as *for convenience sake*, but one cannot say **for the sake of goodness = for goodness sake*. Indeed, none of the other cited examples with the genitive can be paraphrased with their respective corresponding periphrastic construction with *of*. ■

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