Partitive genitive in the North Russian area

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The present paper aims to describe the distribution, semantics and some syntactic properties of the independent or bare partitive genitive (IPG) in North Russian in comparison with Standard Russian. The focus of this study is thus on phenomena that distinguish the use of the IPG in North Russian from Standard Russian. The IPG is a multi-faceted category that bears on the domains of quantification, referentiality and discourse prominence. On its quantificational reading, the IPG encodes a covert quantifier, indefinite in its value. The domain of application of this quantifier has expanded from the domain of the host NP to the clause quantifier in a number of cases. The IPG encodes an indefinite but specific quantification, which explains its high incompatibility with the imperfective aspect in Russian. Generally, the IPG represents a typologically rare case of a clause quantifier (beside the partitive case in the Finnic languages), whose locus of morphological realization is not VP-internal but rather NP- or even N-internal. North Russian, in a similar manner to Standard Russian though with a wider range, attests instances where the covert quantifier induced by the IPG marking changes the quantificational properties of the whole VP altering, as a consequence, its actionality. I claim that the IPG object marking – if the IPG is used as a clause quantifier – always yields delimitative VPs, irrespective of the original actional properties of the verb: it encodes a non-culminating event being temporally and arbitrarily bounded. Different actional classes allocate different phases to yield delimitatives: it is the preparational phase with accomplishments but the after-phase with (some) achievements. Regarding its determiner facet, the IPG typically marks participants that need not have a directly corresponding referent in the real world. Finally, the IPG also discursively demotes the participant which always represents background information, never central to the main message. The three denotational facets are interrelated in their origin and in terms of the prototype effects being organized around the function of the decreasing the referentiality of the referent. Besides different functional properties of the IPG that are not typical of a morphological case, several striking formal properties of the IPG have been found in North Russian such as verbal agreement with the IPG-subject, the ability of the IPG-marked NP to coordinate with structurally case-marked NPs, a wider use of the dedicated partitive ending -*u* or a more frequent use of the IPG under negation than in the spoken standard Russian.