

Year 2 Term 3 Week 6 Day 3

Grammar: The Ablative Absolute

To understand this Latin construction we first of all have to know what a **participle** is. I found this handy definition on line:

“ word formed from a verb (e.g. going, gone, being, been) and used as an adjective (e.g. **working** man, **burnt** toast) or a noun (e.g. good **breeding**).”

In Latin the ablative absolute is just a phrase made up of a noun or pronoun in the ablative case and a participle that agrees with it. In Latin it often has the sense of “having been...” or “being...” The ablative absolute forms an adverbial clause (i.e. a group of words that describe a verb) often of time (i.e. telling **when** the action happened) or cause (i.e. telling **why** an action happened). My old Latin grammar book¹ gives three useful examples:

Duce vulnerato, milites fugerunt

Literally “with the general wounded” –

“The general having been wounded, the soldiers fled.”

Duce (ablative singular of *dux*) ***vulnerato***, (participle) tells **why** the soldiers fled.

His dictis, signum datum est.

Literally “with these things said”

“These things [or “this”] having been said, the signal was given.”

His (ablative masculine plural of *hic*) ***dictis*** (participle) tells **when** the signal was given.

Duce locuto, impetum² fecerunt.

literally “with the general spoken...”

The general having spoken, they charged.

Duce (ablative singular of *dux*) ***locuto*** (participle) tells **when** they charged.

As in any other context you may find an adjective also in the clause qualifying the noun:

Duce magno vulnerato... – the great general having been wounded...

or a noun in the genitive:

Duce eorum vulnerato... - their general having been wounded...

In practice spotting an ablative absolute is not that difficult. If you come across an ablative, followed (or sometimes preceded – see the first Bible example) closely by a noun that agrees with it that looks like a verb, and when you translate it “with...” you can understand the meaning but it sounds wrong in English it is probably an ablative absolute. (What a mouthful, sorry!)

¹ Ritchie, F., *Second Steps in Latin*. (Longmans,1957) An excellent old book to which I often refer.

² *Impetus* is on the IGCSE syllabus and should go in your notebook. As here, in Latin soldiers always “make a charge” which is just translated in English by the verb “to charge.”

Here are some example sentences taken from my old grammar book. I think you will spot the ablative absolute quite easily:

Signo dato, impetum in eos fortititer fecerunt.

Omni spe deposita³, in oppidum se contulerunt⁴.

His rebus auditis, longius⁵ progredi⁶ nolebamus.

Answers on the last page.

Bible examples – check the answers in your Bible:

Et eiecto daemone, locutus est mutus. Matthew 9:33

Mutus “deaf man. The verb in the sentence is the deponent verb *loqui* “to speak.” *Eicere* “to throw out/cast out.”

Et cum haec dixisset, videntibus illis, elevatus est. Acts 1:9.

If you have your wits about you, you will have noticed that *dixisset* is subjunctive. If you didn't notice don't worry. If you have completely forgotten about the subjunctive look over what we did last term in weeks 6 (from day 3) to 8. When the subjunctive has *cum* in front of it (as in this verse) it just means “when”, indicating something that happened before what comes next in the sentence.

Cum haec dixisset is a common phrase in Latin and it just means, “when he had said these things...”. *elevare* “to raise”. (Think: is this verb active, passive, deponent?)

In quo admirantur non concurrentibus vobis in eandem luxuriae confusionem. 1 Peter 4:4

Peter has been speaking about the former way of life of the believers when they used to do the same evil deeds as the unbelievers around them. It is these unbelievers who are the subject of the deponent verb *admirantur*. (*admari* – “to wonder”)

concurrere “to run or flock together” so the ablative ablative clause here is “you not running together [with them]” It tells **why**. In this case we could translate it “because...”.

For *luxuriae confusionem* our English Bible⁷ has “excess of riot.” the Latin words mean “extravagance of disorder.” *eandem* “same.”

Die autem tertio elevatis oculis vidit locum procul Genesis 22:4.

The subject of the verb is Abraham who is journeying at the command of God to Mount Moriah where he has been told to go to sacrifice his son Isaac. *Elevatis oculis* “[his] eyes being raised.”

Tertio is a number. If you have forgotten all about numbers we covered them in Year 2 Term 1 Week 8 Day 1 and Year 2 Term 1 Week 9 Day 1. *Procul* “far, at a distance”.

3 *Deponere* “to resign, give up”

4 *Conferre* “to gather together”

5 Comparative of *longe*.

6 “to march, to advance”

7 Which, of course, is a translation of the original Greek not the Latin.

Answers:

The signal having been given, they charged into/against them bravely.

All hope being given up, they gathered themselves together in the town.

Hearing these things/ these things having been heard, we did not want to advance further.