

Direct and Indirect Questions

Latin MILC – W5, MT 2012

November 13, 2012

1 Direct Questions

1.1 Wh-questions

Like in English, there are a number of very simple questions in Latin, used both in the proper and rhetorical sense, introduced by question words; these often, but not always, begin with *qu-*; for a long list of those, check Bradley's Arnold, ch. 20.

1. *Quis Romam condidit?*
Who founded Rome?
2. *Quando veniet?*
When will he arrive?
3. Where was Sextus Roscius killed?
Ubi occisus est Sex. Roscius?

A few things are worthwhile noting, though. The most straightforward aspects are that questions are usually negated by *non*, and will take the same kind of tense and mood as if they were affirmative sentences. More interestingly, it is quite common for the interrogative *quid* to mean not only 'what?' but also 'why?'.

4. *Quid me decepis?*
Why do you try to deceive me?
5. *Quidni iste neget?*
Why should he deny it?

The last example also brings out the potential rhetoric function of simple questions; whether with deliberative subjunctives, as above, or as part of other devices, they can come in quite handy. Most commonly, they are used to dress negative statements up in rhetorically powerful questions which usually demand a negative reply.

6. *Quae natio non comitatem diligit?*
Which nation does not appreciate courteousness?
7. What in man is more divine than rationality?
Quid est in homine ratione divinius?

1.2 Polar Questions

As in English, Latin has the ability to answer questions which demand the answer 'yes' or 'no'; these are called polar questions. Helpfully, Latin has different question particles depending on whether the expected answer to the question is 'yes' or 'no'.

Nonne is used when a positive answer is expected. These are best translated as 'Is not?'.

8. *Canis nonne similis est lupo?*
Is the dog not similar to the wolf?

Questions which expect a negative answer are introduced by *num*, and should be translated e.g. with a tag question, or a similar device eliciting a negative response.

9. *Numquis id dixerit? - Certe nemo.*

There isn't anyone who claimed this, is there? - Certainly not!

If one wishes not to express the expected answer, a question may be introduced with the neutral enclitic *-ne*; the particle is usually added to the verb, which tends to come first in these questions.

10. Do you not know that it is a saying: they are as alike as two peas in a pod?

Videsne, ut in proverbio sit ovorum inter se similitudo?

1.3 Disjunctive Question

This type of question has more than one component, and usually features an 'or' in it. In Latin, it is usually introduced by *utrum* or one of its forms, whilst the disjunction is made by *an* - **never** *aut* or *vel*!

11. *Utrum factum negabis an tibi hoc licitum esse defendes?*

Will you deny the deed, or defend yourself saying that you had permission?

12. Which of us is on the people's side? You or me?

Uter nostrum popularis est? Tunc an ego?

A few things to keep in mind: if you simply want to negate the first part of the disjunctive question, you may use *an non*.

13. *Pater eius rediit an non?*

Did his father return or not?

An may also appear as an introduction for further specifications or deliberations concerning a previous question.

14. *Mors timenda non est. An id existimas malum, quod omnibus est commune?*

One need not fear death. Or do you hold this to be an evil that befalls everyone the same?

2 Indirect Questions

2.1 General Notes

Indirect questions depend on some sort of superordinate expression, the nature of which can vary greatly. All of these questions occur, however, in the subjunctive and usually obey the sequence of tenses.

More problematically, relative clauses and indirect questions sometimes are very close in form and meaning ('I'm pleased with what [= that which] you have done' vs 'Tell me what you have done?'). In general, Latin prefers indirect questions after verbs of saying, asking and knowing.

15. *Non habeo, quid scribam?*

I don't know what to write.

16. *Quis esset aut quid vellet, quaesivit.*

He asked who he was and what he wanted.

A minor complication, but a stylistically very neat one, occurs when a verb of saying or knowing takes a direct object upon which is dependent a relative clause; in these cases, an indirect question is construed, and the object will be drawn into that clause.

17. *Homines, quas molestias excepturi sint, non provident.*

Mankind does not foresee the tribulations which are looming ahead.

2.2 Finer points

It is **imperative** that you remember never to translate ‘He asked if ...’ or ‘He wondered whether ...’ with Latin *si*! These questions are usually introduced by *-ne*.

18. Epiminondas asked whether his shield was safe.

Epiminondas quaesivit salvusne esset clipeus.

In most other circumstances, indirect questions work along the same lines as their direct counterparts (in the subjunctive, of course).

Note a few smaller things: there are a few petrified forms which, although verbal per se, have not influence on the tense of the ensuing subordinate clause. These are, amongst others: *nescio quis*, *nescio quo modo*, *nescio quo pacto*, etc., i.e. ‘someone’ and ‘somehow’.

19. *Nescio quo pacto auctoritatem oratio non habet.*

Somehow, this speech has no impact.

In indirect questions, *an* may be used after expressions of not knowing and doubting, and will generally mean ‘whether’.

20. *Id cum omnibus est faciendum tum haud scio an nemini potius quam tibi.*

Everyone must do this, and I don’t know whethery anyone else more than you.

Note finally that a number of English abstract expressions are best translated as dependent clauses in Latin; this is true both for the phrases like ‘the number of enemies’ and ‘my father’s murderers’. Both, depending on context, are best rendered as e.g. *Quot essent hostes rogavit.* and ..., *qui patrem meum occiderunt.*

3 Assignment

3.1 Translate into Latin

Please try and translate this as a piece of continuous prose, i.e. with sentence connectives where appropriate. If you'd rather treat them as single sentences for the time being, though, that will be fine as well.

The king summoned his staff and set before them the nature and extent of the danger, the numbers of the enemy, the magnitude of their resources, their aims, designs, and hopes. For my part, said he, I will utter my real sentiments and will not hide the fact that I have no doubt that both all (of) you and I myself are today involved in the greatest danger.

I know that it is difficult to say whether the reinforcements which we look for will ever reach us, or whether we shall perish first, overwhelmed by the weapons of this enormous host. But whether we are to live or die, I venture to feel sure of this at least, that no one of us will allow himself to think it a light matter, whether our countrymen are to be grateful to us in our graves or to scorn (despise) us in our lives ; so that we need only deliberate on one single question, by what course of action or of endurance we shall best serve our common country. Possibly we can consult our own safety by remaining here, sheltered and preserved by these walls ; and perhaps this is the safer plan but it sometimes happens that the most daring course is the safest and I hope to persuade you that it will so turn out today.

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staff	<i>legatus, -i (m.)</i>
nature, extent, ...	[Translate abstracts as indirect questions]
to hide the fact that ...	<i>dissimulare, -o, -avi, -atum + acc. w/ inf.</i>
to venture	<i>audēre, -ēo, ausus sum + prolative inf.</i>
to feel/be sure of something	<i>pro certo habere + acc.</i>
to turn out	<i>evenire, evenio, evēni, eventum</i>

3.2 Reading & Analysis

For next week, please read the beginning of ch. 6 of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* below; also, please pick two sentences from the text and give a full functional analysis of how it works (no need to parse everything, but show that you understand the structure).

Urbem Romam, sicuti ego accepi, condidere atque habuere initio Troiani, qui Aeneae duce profugi sedibus incertis vagabantur, cumque iis Aborigines, genus hominum agreste, sine legibus, sine imperio, liberum atque solutum. Hi postquam in una moenia convenere, dispari genere, dissimili lingua, alii alio more viventes, incredibile memoratu est, quam facile coaluerint: ita brevi multitudo dispersa atque vaga concordia civitas facta erat.

Please hand in your assignment by Friday 6pm, either by email to robin.meyer@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk, or by pigeon post to *Robin Meyer, Wolfson College, Linton Rd.*