

# Use of Participles & Ablativus Absolutus

Latin MILC – W3, HT 2013

January 29, 2013

## 1 Participles

Functionally speaking, a participle is a nominal or adjectival form of the verb. Latin distinguishes three participles: present active (-ns), perfect passive (-tus, -sus) and future active (-urus); not every verb will form all participial forms.

For idiomatic reasons, adjectival participles agreeing with nominal expressions (so-called *participia coniuncta*) are often best translated as either abstract nouns or subordinate phrases; accordingly, you should use them (where possible and sensible) to vary your style.

- (1) I will always yield to those who speak the truth.  
*Verum dicentibus facile cedam.*
- (2) I questioned some by-standers.  
*Nescio quem prope adstantem interrogavi.*
- (3) Although he was afraid of his father, he answered my question.  
*Patrem veritus interroganti mihi respondit.*

Participles express time relations: contemporaneity (pres.act.), anteriority (perf.pass.) and posteriority (fut.act.). In addition, causal and concessive connotations can be expressed (rare for the pres.act.). Note that purpose and result cannot be expressed, largely due to the fact that participial phrases express circumstances.

- (4) I met him as he was going to his death.  
*Ad mortem eunti obviam factus sum.*
- (5) He followed his father and sailed to Spain.  
*Patrem secutus ad Hispaniam navigavit.*
- (6) Caesar, hoping soon to win the day, led out his men.  
*Caesar, cum se brevi victurum esse speraret, suos eduxit.*

Remember that Latin is not Greek. The present participle is used sparingly, and very rarely in adjectival function. It is, however, used at times as a generalising noun in the oblique cases, e.g. *pugnantium clamore perterritus* 'alarmed by the shouts of the combatants'. When using the pres.act. participle, first check whether the action described is still on-going; if it is not, use a subordinate clause.

- (7) The Biturians were attacked by the cavalry during their work in the fields.  
*Rura colentes Bituriges ab equitatu oppressi sunt.*
- (8) In his 'Cato Maior' Cicero introduced the old Cato as a speaker.  
*In Catone Maiore Cicero Catonem senem induxit disputantem.*
- (9) Ascending the mountain, the soldiers saw a fox hunting in a field.  
*Milites montem ascendentes vulpem in silva observaverunt venantem.*

## 2 Ablativus Absolutus

Like the participium coniunctum, the ablativus absolutus allows for the expression of circumstances relative to the main action of the sentence; it is important to note, however, that the action of the abl.abs. should be grammatically and semantically independent of the main sentence.

The abl.abs. usually consists of a noun, pronoun or nominalised adjective and a participle, both of which agree in ablative case and number; the participle may take objects or adverbs. As with the participial clauses above, the abl.abs. may have various connotations: causal, modal, conditional and concessive.

- (10) Pythagoras came to Italy during the rule of Superbus.  
*Pythagoras Superbo regnante in Italiam venit.*
- (11) *Treveri desperatis nostris rebus domum contenderunt.*  
Since the Treveri gave up on our cause, they went home.
- (12) *Germani renonum tegimentis utuntur magna corporis parte nuda.*  
The Germani use fur as garments, whereby a large part of their body remains nude.
- (13) If religious ties fade, loyalty fades as well.  
*Religione sublata fides quoque tollitur.*
- (14) Caesar was unable to take the city although only few men were defending it.  
*Caesar oppidum paucis defendentibus expugnare non potuit.*

At times, the participle in the abl.abs. is replaced by another noun or adjective in the ablative, e.g. *me invito, te duce, salvo capite*. A few more things to keep in mind: abl.abs. tend to appear early on in a clause; be careful only to use them with transitive verbs in the passive; make sure it is truly absolute, i.e. independent.

## 3 Assignment

### 3.1 Translate into Latin

Please translate this as a piece of continuous prose.

Quintus Mucius Scaevola, the augur, used to relate with an accurate memory, and in a pleasing way many incidents about his father-in-law, Gaius Laelius, and, in every mention of him, did not hesitate to call him "the Wise". Now, I, upon assuming the toga virilis, had been introduced by my father to Scaevola with the understanding that, so far as I could and he would permit, I should never leave the old man's side. And so it came to pass that, in my desire to gain greater profit from his legal skill, I made it a practice to commit to memory many of his learned opinions and many, too, of his brief and pointed sayings. After his death I betook myself to the pontiff, Scaevola, who, both in intellect and in integrity, was, I venture to assert, quite the most distinguished man of our State. But of him I shall speak at another time; now I return to the augur.

Numerous events in the latter's life often recur to me, but the most memorable one of all occurred at his home, as he was sitting, according to his custom, on a semi-circular garden bench, when I and only a few of his intimate friends were with him, and he happened to fall upon a topic which, just about that time, was in many people's mouths. You, Atticus, were much in the society of Publius Sulpicius, and on that account are the more certain to remember what great astonishment, or rather complaining, there was among the people when Sulpicius, while plebeian tribune, separated himself in deadly hatred from the then consul, Quintus Pompeius, with whom he had lived on the most intimate and affectionate terms.'

And so, Scaevola, having chanced to mention this very fact, thereupon proceeded to repeat to us a discussion on friendship, which Laelius had had with him and with

another son-in-law, Gaius Fannius, son of Marcus, a few days after the death of Africanus. I committed the main points of that discussion to memory, and have set them out in the present book in my own way; for I have, so to speak, brought the actors themselves on the stage in order to avoid too frequent repetition of "said I" and "said he," and to create the impression that they are present and speaking in person.

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**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.***