

LESSON 5

Genitive Absolute

5.1. The Usual Construction

A Participle may be used with its own Subject in the Genitive Case, where that Subject does not normally appear elsewhere in the same clause. The Participles in a Genitive absolute have a more restricted range of meaning than a circumstantial Participle agreeing with a noun in any Case or agreeing with the unexpressed Subject of a verb (as indicated by the ending of the verb).

5.1.1. Time

ὕμεῖς οὖν καὶ αὐτοὶ ὕστερον, κακῶν οὐκ ἐλαττόντων ἢ ἐκείνοις γεγενημένων, ἀγαθοὶ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν ὄντες ἀπέδοτε τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν ἀρετὴν· (And. 1.109.)

So subsequently, when troubles no less serious had happened than <had happened> to those <men>, you yourselves, being good <men> descended from good <ancestors>, displayed their traditional virtue.

Negative οὐκ.

5.1.2. Cause

ἀντιλέγοντος δὲ Ἀλκιβιάδου πολλὰ καὶ ἐξάρνου ὄντος ἔδοξε τοῖς πρυτάνεσι τοὺς μὲν ἀμυήτους μεταστήσασθαι ... (And. 1.12.)

And since Alcibiades was speaking at length in opposition and was denying <the accusation>, the members of the standing committee decided to remove the uninitiated ...

5.1.3. Condition

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἦν ἐμοῦ μὴ εἰπόντος· (And. 1.59.)
Well then, this was <the situation>, if I did not speak.

Negative μή.

5.1.4. Concession

... νῦν ἐγὼ ἤκω οὐδεμιᾶς μοι ἀνάγκης οὔσης παραμεῖναι ...
 (And. 1.2.)
... now I have come, although there is no compulsion for me to stay here ...

Negative οὐ (compound).

5.1.5. Attendant Circumstances in General

νῦν γὰρ ἐμέ μὲν λόγον δεῖ διδόναι τῶν ἐμοὶ πεπραγμένων μετὰ
 τῆς ἀληθείας, αὐτῶν παρόντων οἵπερ ἤμαρτον καὶ ἔφυγον ταῦτα
 ποιήσαντες ... (And. 1.55.)

*For now I must truthfully give an account of what has been done by me, when
 there are present the very <men> who did wrong and went into exile after
 doing this ...*

5.2. Subject Unexpressed

A Participle is sometimes used in the Genitive absolute without an expressed Genitive Subject. This may occur when the Subject is easily understood from the context, or is general (and sometimes deliberately vague), or when the Participle is used impersonally with a ὅτι clause or an Accusative and Infinitive phrase as its Subject.

πεφασμένου δὲ τίς ποθ' ἢ προθυμία; (S.OT 838.)
And when <he> has appeared, what at such time <will be> your desire?

The unexpressed Subject of πεφασμένου is 'the herdsman' of the previous line, τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν βοτῆρα (S.OT 837.)

στένει πόλισμα γῆθεν ὡς κυκλουμένων. (A.Th. 247.)
The city groans from the earth, since <people> are surrounding <it>.

Those who are besieging Thebes are more generally indicated solely by the Participle κυκλουμένων (understood as Mid.).

τελουμένων εἴποιμ' ἄν· (S.El. 1344.)

When <things> are being brought to an end, I would tell <you>.

Here, the neuter Participle contains a deliberately vague reference to the plan to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

σημανθέντων δὲ τῷ Ἀστυάγει ὅτι πολέμοι εἰσιν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ, ἔξεβοήθει καὶ αὐτὸς πρὸς τὰ ὄρια σὺν τοῖς περὶ αὐτόν ... (X.Cyr. 1.4.18.)

But when it was indicated to Astyages that there were enemy in the country, he himself went out to the borders with his attendants to help ...

In this impersonal construction, the ὅτι clause is the Subject of the neuter plural Participle σημανθέντων. Often, in such constructions, the Participle is artificially plural in keeping with a plural Subject of the ὅτι clause.

5.3. Improper Genitive Absolute

Improper Genitive absolute constructions occur where the Subject of the Genitive phrase is the same as a Nominative, Accusative or Dative of the main construction. An improper Genitive absolute usually precedes the Main verb. This irregular construction, which emphasises the idea expressed by the Genitive absolute, became more common in the Hellenistic period.

ὅμως δὲ οὔτε ξυνοικισθείσης πόλεως οὔτε ἱεροῖς καὶ κατασκευαῖς πολυτελέσι χρησαμένης, κατὰ κώμας δὲ τῷ παλαιῷ τῆς Ἑλλάδος τρόπῳ οἰκισθείσης, φάνοιτ' ἄν ὑποδεεστέρα. (Th. 1.10.2.)

Nevertheless, since the community had not been combined into a single <city>, and did not have the use of temples and expensive structures, but had been settled as a group of villages in the early manner of Greece, it would appear rather deficient.

The 'community' of Sparta is the Subject of three successive Participles in an improper Genitive absolute construction, but then becomes the Nominative Subject of the Main verb φάνοιτο.

References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§847–850.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§2058, 2070–2074.

EXERCISE 5

Translate the following passages.

1. ... βουλόμενοι δὲ τὸ Πάνακτον παραλαβεῖν ὡς τὴν Πύλον ἀντ' αὐτοῦ κομιούμενοι, ... ἐποίησαντο τὴν ξυμμαχίαν τοῦ χειμῶνος τελευτώντος ἤδη καὶ πρὸς ἔαρ.

παραλαμβάνειν	<i>to acquire</i>
κομίζειν	<i>to obtain</i> (with Fut. Mid.)
χειμῶν, -ῶνος, ὁ	<i>winter</i>
ἔαρ, ἡρὸς, τό	<i>spring</i>

2. ἐγὼ τῶν ἀρχόντων κελεύοντων συνεπριάμην.

ἀρχων, -οντος, ὁ	<i>magistrate</i> (as in Exercise 4.6)
συνπρίασθαι (Aor.)	<i>to buy up</i> (Understand 'the grain' as Object.)

3. ... Ἄνυτος δ' ἔλεγεν ὡς τοῦ προτέρου χειμῶνος, ἐπειδὴ τίμιος ἦν ὁ σίτος τούτων ὑπερβαλλόντων ἀλλήλους καὶ πρὸς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς μαχομένων, συμβουλεύσειεν αὐτοῖς παύσασθαι φιλονικούσιν ...

χειμῶν, -ῶνος, ὁ	<i>winter</i>
τίμιος, (-α,) -ον	<i>expensive, at a high price</i>
ὑπερβάλλειν	<i>to outbid</i>
μάχεσθαι	<i>to fight</i>
συμβουλεύειν	<i>to advise</i> (+ Dat. and Infin.)
φιλονικεῖν	<i>to squabble</i> (here Dat. pl. Partc. with αὐτοῖς)

4. ὥστ' ἐνίοτε εἰρήνης οὐσης ὑπὸ τούτων πολιορκούμεθα.

ἐνίοτε (adv.)	<i>sometimes</i> (Modifies πολιορκούμεθα.)
πολιορκεῖν	<i>to besiege</i>

5. καὶ ἄλλου οὐδενὸς ἐθέλοντος βαδίζειν ... ἐγὼ τὸν ἀκόλουθον τὸν ἐμαυτοῦ πέμπειν ἕτοιμος ἦ·

βαδίζειν	<i>to go</i>
ἀκόλουθος, -ον	<i>attendant</i> (adj. used as noun)
ἕτοιμος, (-η,) -ον	<i>ready, prepared</i>

6. ὅτι δὲ μέλλετε, ἅμα τῷ ἦρι εὐθύς καὶ μὴ ἐς ἀναβολὰς πράσσετε, ὡς τῶν πολεμίων τὰ μὲν ἐν Σικελίᾳ δι' ὀλίγου ποριουμένων ...

μέλλειν	<i>to intend</i>
ἅμα (adv.)	<i>at the same time as (+ Dat.), at the beginning of</i>
εὐθύς (adv.)	<i>immediately</i>
ἐς ἀναβολὰς	<i>with (respect to) delay(s)</i>
τὰ ... ἐν Σικελίᾳ	<i>the <forces> ... in Sicily</i>
δι' ὀλίγου	<i>within a short <time>, shortly</i>
πορίζεσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to procure</i>

7. ... ὅτε ἦν ἀφανῆς ὁ ἀνήρ, οὐδεὶς ἠτιάσατό με ἀνθρώπων, ἥδη πεπυσμένων τούτων τὴν ἀγγελίαν.

ἀφανῆς, -ές	<i>unseen, missing</i>
αἰτιάσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to blame</i>
πυνθάνεσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to learn (by inquiry)</i>

8. For they make most profit then, when, after something bad has been reported to the city, they sell the grain at a high price.

<i>most</i>	πλεῖστα (neut. Acc. pl.)
<i>to make profit</i>	κερδαίνειν
<i>when</i> (indef.)	ὅταν (+ Subj.)
<i>after ... reported</i>	Use Gen. abs.

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