

# LESSON 6

## Accusative Absolute

### 6.1. Introduction

Instead of a Genitive absolute, an Accusative absolute is used:

1. with Participles of so-called impersonal verbs
2. with Participles of verbs which are used impersonally in the Passive Voice
3. with neuter adjectives which are used with the Participle of the verb 'to be'
4. and sometimes with a Participle which has an explicit Subject other than an Infinitive phrase.

These four categories will be treated separately in the following sections.

The Participles in the Accusative absolute have the same restriction of meaning as those in the Genitive absolute. *καίπερ* is not used with the Accusative absolute constructions, although they may have a Concessive force.

### 6.2. So-Called Impersonal Verbs

Some common verbs, which are usually designated 'impersonal', are *δεῖ*, meaning 'it is necessary'; and *ἔξεστι* and *πάρεστι*, both meaning 'it is possible', 'it is permissible'. Such verbs are often described as being 'followed by' an Infinitive. These verbs are not 'impersonal' in the sense that they do not have a grammatical Subject. Rather, they may have an Infinitive or Infinitive phrase as Subject. Thus, *ἔξεστιν ὑμῖν φίλους γενέσθαι* (Th. 4.20.3) may be translated 'it is possible for you to become friends'. But in grammatical structure, the phrase *φίλους γενέσθαι* is Subject of *ἔξεστιν*, 'to become friends is possible for you'. (Cf. Lesson 3.4.1.)

Such verbs use a neuter singular Accusative absolute of the Participle instead of a Genitive absolute. The construction is first attested in Herodotus (Ionic) and in Attic prose writers of the fifth century BCE. The Participles are most often used in the Imperfect Aspect. Apart from δόξαν and τυχόν (and their compounds), the Aorist Participle rarely appears.

τί παρθενεύη δαρόν, ἐξόν σοι γάμου  
τυχεῖν μεγίστου; (A.Pr. 648–649.)

*Why do you so long remain a virgin, when it is possible for you  
to obtain the greatest marriage?*

However, an impersonal verb does not always have an Infinitive phrase as Subject, either with a finite verb form or in an Accusative absolute.

ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τούτων, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, οὐδὲν μέτεστιν.  
(Pl.Ap. 19 C.)

*But really, O men of Athens, I am not involved in these matters [lit. there is  
no share for me of these matters].*

οὐδέν, not an Infinitive, is Subject of the finite verb μέτεστιν.

... ἐκέλευον Κορινθίους τοὺς ἐν Ἐπιδάμνῳ φρουροὺς τε καὶ  
οἰκήτορας ἀπάγειν, ὡς οὐ μετὸν αὐτοῖς Ἐπιδάμνου. (Th. 1.28.1.)

*... they were ordering the Corinthians to withdraw their garrison members  
and colonists in Epidamnus, on the grounds that they had no claim to  
Epidamnus [lit. there not being a share for them of Epidamnus].*

There is no Subject for the neuter Accusative Participle μετόν. ὡς emphasises that the grounds are alleged by the Corinthians, not by the writer Thucydides.

### 6.3. Verbs Used Impersonally in the Passive Voice

The Accusative absolute construction also occurs with the Participles of verbs which are used impersonally in the third person singular Indicative Passive. Some of the more common examples are in the Perfect Aspect; the Aorist Passive Participle occurs more rarely.

... προύλεγον τὸ περὶ Μεγαρέων ψήφισμα καθελοῦσι μὴ ἂν γίνεσθαι πόλεμον, ἐν ᾧ εἶρητο αὐτοὺς μὴ χρῆσθαι τοῖς λιμέσι τοῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀθηναίων ἀρχῇ μηδὲ τῇ Ἀττικῇ ἀγορᾷ. (Th. 1.139.1.)

... they declared <to them> that a war would not occur, if they rescinded the decree about the Megarians, in which it had been stated that they were not to use the ports in the control of the Athenians nor the Athenian market-place.

εἶρητο is impersonal third person singular Past Perfect Indicative Passive. However, the whole Accusative and Infinitive phrase αὐτοὺς ... ἀγορᾷ, is the Subject of εἶρητο. Compare §6.2 above. (The negatives in the passage are μή, because προύλεγον represents an ultimatum and εἶρητο refers to a decree.)

The following example uses the Perfect Passive Participle of the same verb in the neuter singular Accusative absolute.

προπέπεμπται δ' ὡς αὐτούς, καὶ ἀπαντᾶν εἰρημένον καὶ σιτία ἄμα κομίζειν. (Th. 7.77.6.)

And <instructions> have been sent ahead to them, since it has been stated both that <they> are to meet and that <they> are to bring provisions at the same time.

The whole Infinitive phrase καὶ ἀπαντᾶν ... καὶ σιτία ἄμα κομίζειν, representing a command, is the grammatical Subject of εἰρημένον.

... Ἡσίοδος ὁ ποιητῆς λέγεται ὑπὸ τῶν ταύτη ἀποθανεῖν, χρησθέν αὐτῷ ἐν Νεμέα τοῦτο παθεῖν ... (Th. 3.96.1.)

... Hesiod the poet is said to have been killed by the people here, when it had been prophesied to him that he <was to> suffer this in Nemea ...

The Infinitive phrase ἐν Νεμέα τοῦτο παθεῖν is the grammatical Subject of the Aorist Passive Participle χρησθέν.

## 6.4. Neuter Adjectives

Some neuter adjectives are used impersonally with the Indicative of the verb 'to be', for example: αἰσχρόν ἐστι, 'it is disgraceful', and δυνατόν ἐστι, 'it is possible'. Such adjectives may be used in an Accusative absolute construction with the Participle of the verb 'to be'.

τοὺς δὲ λόγους μακροτέρους οὐ παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς μηκνυόμεν, ἀλλ' ἐπιχώριον ὄν ἡμῖν οὐ μὲν βραχεῖς ἀρκῶσι μὴ πολλοῖς χρῆσθαι, πλέοσι δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἂν καιρὸς διδάσκοντάς τι τῶν προύργου λόγοις τὸ δέον πρᾶσσειν. (Th. 4.17.2.)

*And we shall prolong our words at greater length not contrary to our custom, but because it is characteristic for us not to use many <words> when few are sufficient, but to achieve what is necessary when there is opportunity by explaining something of what is useful in more words.*

In this passage, the whole section οὐ μὲν ... χρῆσθαι is the grammatical Subject of ὄν and ἐπιχώριον is its Complement.

In this construction, the adjective and the Participle are in the neuter singular, but in the following example, the adjective and Participle are plural, despite the fact that the grammatical Subject of the Participle is the (singular) Infinitive phrase παντὶ ... πιστεῦσαι.

τὰ μὲν οὖν παλαιὰ τοιαῦτα ἡῦρον, χαλεπὰ ὄντα παντὶ ἐξῆς τεκμηρίῳ πιστεῦσαι. (Th. 1.20.1.)

*Well then, I found the early <events to be> such, although it was difficult to rely on every inference along the way.*

## 6.5. Personal Accusative Absolute

Sometimes, a personal construction is used in the Accusative absolute: the Participle has an Accusative Subject other than an Infinitive phrase. ὡς or ὥσπερ generally introduces this construction. The Participle is usually in the neuter Gender and is often derived from a verb which is used impersonally. But this personal construction may occur with any Gender or Number.

### 6.5.1. With ὡς or ὥσπερ

ὁ δ', ὡς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἔσθ' ὁ πληθύων λόγος,  
τὸ κοῖλον Ἄργος βὰς φυγὰς προσλαμβάνει  
κῆδός τε καινὸν καὶ ξυνασπιστάς φίλους  
ὡς αὐτίκ' Ἄργος ἢ τὸ Καδμείων πέδον  
τιμῇ καθέξον ἢ πρὸς οὐρανὸν βιβῶν. (S.OC 377–381.)

*But he, as the current story among us is,  
having gone as an exile to the valley of Argos, is taking on  
a new relationship and companions in arms as friends,  
on the understanding that presently Argos either will occupy the Cadmeans'  
land in honour or will exalt it to heaven.*

ὥς is used with Ἄργος as Accusative Subject of the Intensive ('Fut.') Participles καθέξον and βιβῶν (neut. sg. contracted α).

### 6.5.2. Without ὥς or ὥσπερ

ὁ δέ, εἶτε καὶ διὰ τὸ ἐπιβόημα εἶτε καὶ αὐτῷ ἄλλο τι ἢ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ δόξαν ἐξαίφνης, πάλιν τὸ στράτευμα κατὰ τάχος πρὶν ξυμμεῖξαι ἀπήγεν. (Th. 5.65.3.)

*But he, whether actually on account of the shout or rather because some other <course of action> than the one he was currently following suddenly seemed right to him, began to lead the army away again in haste before making contact with <the enemy>.*

The whole Accusative absolute phrase runs from αὐτῷ to ἐξαίφνης.

ἄλλο τι (ἢ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό) is the Subject of the Aorist Participle δόξαν.

καὶ reinforces εἶτε in each occurrence of the phrase εἶτε καὶ: 'actually ... rather'.

κατὰ τὸ αὐτό means literally 'in accordance with the same'.

## 6.6. Note

In the Hellenistic period, the Accusative absolute is partly replaced by the Genitive absolute—papyri frequently have ἐξόντος for ἐξόν—and partly drops out of use altogether.

## References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§851–854.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§2059, 2076–2078, 2086d, 2087, cf. 905, 932–935 (impersonal verbs).

## EXERCISE 6

Translate the following passages.

1. ὁ δ' ἐς τοσοῦτον μωρίας ἀφίκετο,  
ὥστ', ἐξὸν αὐτῷ τᾶμ' ἐλεῖν βουλευμάτα  
γῆς ἐκβαλόντι, τήνδ' ἀφῆκεν ἡμέραν  
μεῖναί μ' ...

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ὁ	<i>he</i>
ἐς τοσοῦτον	<i>to so great (a degree of) (+ Gen.)</i>
μωρία, -ας, ἡ	<i>foolishness</i>
τᾶμ'	<i>τὰ ἐμά</i>
ἐλεῖν (Aor.)	<i>to destroy, to ruin</i>
βούλευμα, -ατος, τό	<i>purpose, intention</i>
ἀφιέναι	<i>to allow</i>
μ'	<i>με</i>

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2. Ἀλκιβιάδης δ' ἐτόλμησεν ἀναβῆναι, ... ὡς οὐκ ἐξεσόμενον τῇ  
πόλει δίκην παρὰ τῶν ἀδικούντων λαμβάνειν.

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ἀναβαίνειν	<i>to mount (a horse)</i>
ἀδικεῖν	<i>to do wrong</i>

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3. προσταχθὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ τεττάρων μηνῶν ἀναγράψαι τοὺς νόμους  
τοὺς Σόλωνος, ... ἐξέτη τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο ...

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προστάττειν	<i>to give instructions (Acc.) to someone (Dat.) to do (Infin.)</i>
μείς οὐ μῆν, μηνός, ὁ	<i>month</i>
ἀναγράφειν	<i>to write up/out, to record</i>
ἐξέτης, -ες	<i>(here) lasting six years; (usually) six years old</i>
ἀρχή, -ῆς, ἡ	<i>office, appointment</i>

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4. ... καὶ ἄδηλον ὄν ὁπότε σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ξυρράξουσι, ... πῶς οὐκ εἰκότως ἠθύμουν;

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ξυρράσσειν	<i>to fight with, to clash with (+ Dat.)</i>
εἰκότως	<i>reasonably, with (good) reason</i>
ἄθυμειν	<i>to be disheartened (here 3rd pers. pl.)</i>

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5. ὅς πρῶτον μὲν μεθ' ἡμέραν ἐξέκοπτον τὸν σηκόν, ὥσπερ οὐ πάντας λαθεῖν δέον, ἀλλὰ πάντας Ἀθηναίους εἰδέναί.

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ὅς	<i>For ... I (coordinating relative pronoun)</i>
πρῶτον	<i>in the first place</i>
μεθ' ἡμέραν	<i>by day, in the day-time</i>
ἐκκόπτειν	<i>to cut out</i>
σηκός, -οῦ, ὄ	<i>olive-stump</i>
ὥσπερ	<i>as if</i>
πάντας λαθεῖν	πάντας is Object of λαθεῖν.
πάντας Ἀθηναίους	Subject of εἰδέναί.

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6. δόξαντα δὲ ταῦτα καὶ περανθέντα, τὰ μὲν στρατεύματα ἀπῆλθε ...

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περαίνειν	<i>to bring to an end, to finish</i>
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7. σοὶ γὰρ παρὸν γῆν τήνδε καὶ δόμους ἔχειν κούφως φερούση κρεισσόνων βουλευματα, λόγων ματαίων οὐνεκ' ἐκπεσῆ χθονός.

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ἔχειν	<i>to inhabit, to live in</i>
κούφως	<i>lightly</i>
μάταιος, -α, -ον	<i>rash</i>
οὐνεκα	<i>because of (after Gen.)</i>
ἐκπίπτειν	Used instead of Pass. of ἐκβάλλειν.

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8. But if *we* are taking revenge later, although it was necessary to take revenge long ago, he gains the time during which he was living, although it was not appropriate for him [to do so] ...

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<i>to take revenge</i>	τιμωρέϊσθαι (Mid.)
<i>later</i>	ὔστερον
<i>although it was necessary</i>	Use Acc. abs.
<i>long ago</i>	πάλαι
<i>time</i>	χρόνος, -ου, ὁ
<i>during</i>	Use Acc. of extent.
<i>he was living</i>	ἔζη
<i>to be appropriate (for)</i>	προσήκειν (+ Dat.) Use Acc. abs.

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