

CHAPTER 6

"Sum: Future and Imperfect Indicative; Possum: Present,
Future, and Imperfect Indicative; Complementary Infinitive"

The two verbs which are the subject of this chapter are closely
related -- "**possum**" ("**to be able**") uses the forms of the verb
"**sum**" ("**to be**") -- so you don't have to learn two separate
irregular verbs outright. You can tie them together.

SUM, ESSE: FUTURE TENSE

You have already learned the present tense of the irregular verb "sum". And those of you who followed my expanded notes on these forms know the whole truth about the present tense. Those of you who skipped them, I recommend you go back to that section and read them now. They will help you with this discussion.

Do you remember how you formed the future tense of the first and second conjugation verbs? It was something like this:

stem + tense sign + personal endings = conjugated forms

The verb "sum" follows this formula exactly, but it has a tense

sign for the future you haven't seen before. Let's start at the beginning.

(1) The stem of the verb "to be" is "es-".

(2) The tense sign for the future is short "-e-". For the

first and second conjugations, the tense sign of the

future was "be-", and the short "-e-" of the tense sign

underwent changes when the personal endings were added

to it. Do you remember what they were? The short

"-e-" future tense sign will undergo the same changes.

(3) The personal endings are the same you've been using all

along: "-o" or "-m", "-s", "-t" etc.

So let's set up a construction table for the future of "sum". For

now, fill in all the information except the conjugated form.

FUTURE TENSE: "sum, esse"

STEM + TENSE SIGN + PERS. END. = CONJUGATED

FORMS

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

There is one more thing you need to know before you can

finish this off. It's a rule of Latin pronunciation that whenever an "-s-" is between two vowels (when it's "intervocalic", as the professionals say), it changes from "-s-" to "-r-". Now look at the stem of "sum". "Es-" plus the tense sign "-e-" will put the "-s-" between two vowels, so the "-s-" of the stem will become an "-r-": "ese-" = "ere-". That, then, will be the base to which you add the personal endings. Now fill out the conjugated forms -- and remember the changes the short "-e-" is going to go through. (Check Wheelock, p. 27.)

SUM, ESSE: IMPERFECT TENSE

The imperfect tense is a new tense for you, and we're not going to look very deeply into it here. For now, just remember that the imperfect tense of "sum" is our "was" and "were". At least don't call this the past tense; call it the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense is formed along the same lines as the future tense:

stem + tense sign + personal endings = conjugated forms

Obviously, since this is a different tense, the tense sign is not going to be the same as the future tense sign. The tense sign of the imperfect is "-a-". One other slight difference is that the imperfect tense uses the alternate first person singular ending: "-m" instead of the expected "-o". And don't forget the rule of

"-s-": when it's intervocalic, it changes to "-r-". Fill out the

following table:

IMPERFECT TENSE: "sum, esse"

STEM + TENSE SIGN + PERS. END. = CONJUGATED

FORMS

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

POSSUM, POSSE: PRESENT, FUTURE, IMPERFECT TENSES

In Latin, the verb "to be able" is a combination of the adjective base "pot-" ("able") plus the forms of the verb "sum". To say "I am able", Latin took the adjective "pot-" and combined it with the present tense of "sum". To say "I will be able", Latin used "pot-" plus the future of "sum". To say "I was able", Latin used "pot-" plus the imperfect of "sum". For the verb "possum", then, it is the verb "sum" provides the person, number, and the tense.

In the present tense, there is one glitch: wherever the verb "sum" starts with an "s-", the "-t-" of "pot-" becomes an "-s-"

also. So you see "possum" instead of "potsum" (from "pot + sum"), and so on. (When a consonant turns into the consonant which it is next to, we call this "assimilation". So we would say "t" assimilates to "s".)

The one real oddity of the verb is its infinitive. We might expect "potesse" ("pot + esse") according to the rules, but the form "posse" is just one of those unexpected moments in life where things get out of control. You might want to remember it this way: the English word "posse" is a group of citizens who have been granted power to make arrests: that is, they have "ableness". Fill out the following charts for the verb "possum, posse".

PRESENT TENSE: possum, posse

ADJECTIVE + CONJUGATED FORM OF SUM = CONJUGATED FORM

1st pot _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

FUTURE TENSE: possum, posse

ADJECTIVE + CONJUGATED FORM OF SUM = CONJUGATED FORM

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

IMPERFECT TENSE: possum, posse

ADJECTIVE + CONJUGATED FORM OF SUM = CONJUGATED FORM

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

The only real difficulty with "possum" is the English

translations for it. If you stick with "to be able", "will be able", and "was/were able", you'll get through just fine. But you can also translate "possum" with the English verb "can". But "can", although it is popular in English, is loaded with oddities. For one, it has no future tense -- "I will can??" -- and secondly, the imperfect tense is "could", which is also a conditional of some kind or another in English: "Do you think I could have a dollar?" Try to stay with "to be able" for now, but be aware of the possibilities of "can".

THE COMPLEMENTARY INFINITIVE

If you were to walk up to a stranger and, out of the blue, say "I am able", you'd be answered by a pause. The stranger would be expecting you to complete your thought: "Yes, you're able to do what?" That's because "to be able" requires another verb to complete its sense, and the form the completing verb will have is the infinitive. It needs a completing infinitive (or "complementary infinitive"). This is true in Latin as well. "Possum" in all its forms will be followed by another verb in the infinitive form: "Poterunt videre nostros filios". (They will be able to see our sons.)

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

liber, -bri (m) How are you going to keep the noun for "book"

distinct in your mind from the adjective for

"free": "liber, -a, -um". For one, the "-i-"

in "liber, -bri (m)" is short, but it's long in

"liber, -a, -um". Next, there is a stem change

in "liber, -bri (m)" but not in "liber, -a,

-um". So if you see an inflected form "libr-

something", then you know the word means

"book(s)". Remember this by recalling their

English derivatives: library is from the

stem-changing "liber, -bri (m)", and "liberty"

is from "liber" in which there is no stem

change. For the most part, derived words come

from the stem of the nouns, not the nominative singular.

vitium, -ii (n) Please don't confuse this with the word for

life "vita, -ae, (f)". Keep them straight this

way: "vicious", which comes from "vitium", has

an "-i-" after the "-t", but "vital", which

comes from "vita", does not. "Vitia" means

"vices" or "crimes"; "vita" means "life".

Graecus, -a, -um Like "Romanus, -a, -um", this adjective can be

used as a noun: "Graecus" can be translated as

"a Greek man", and "Graeca" as "a Greek woman",

or as an adjective: "Graecus liber" = "a Greek

book".

-que As Wheelock tells you, this word (called an

enclitic because it "leans on" another word and

never stands alone in a sentence) is attached

to the end of the second word of two that are

to be linked. Think of it this way: "x yque"

= "x et y".

ubi If "ubi" comes first in a sentence which is a

question, always translate it as "Where". "Ubi

es?" (Where are you?) But when it is in the

middle of a sentence, it can be translated as

either "where" or "when", and does not mean

that a question is being asked. You must try

them both out to see which of the two

possibilities makes more sense.

insidiae, -arum (f) We translate this word, although it is always

plural in Latin, as the singular "plot", or

"treachery". It's going to happen often that

ideas which are conceived of as plural in

Latin are thought of as singular in English.

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