

CHAPTER 18

“The Passive Voice for the 1st and 2nd Conjugations in the Present System; Ablative of Agent”

THE ACTIVE VOICE

Up to this point in Latin, you've been working with verbs only in the “active voice”; that is, in forms which show that the subject of the verb is the agent of the action denoted in the verb. For example, in the sentence “Pueri litteras ad amicos suos mittent”, the subject (“pueri”) of the verb (“mittent”), and it is the “pueri” who are actually performing the action. And how do we know that the subject of the verb is the author of the action? In the present system, the verb tells you so in the personal ending. Do you remember the personal endings in Latin in the present system:

-o, -m	I	-mus	we
-s	you	-tis	you
-t	he, she, it	-nt	they

You learned that these endings tell you the person and number of the subject, but they actually were telling you more than that, though I kept it from you. Now it's time to come clean: these endings also tell you that the subject of the verb is itself performing the action of the verb. That is to say, these endings tell you the number and person of the subject, but additionally they tell you that the verb is in the “active voice”. So these endings are more than the personal endings for the present

system; they are the present system “active” personal endings.

THE PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH

The grammars of Latin and English both recognize another “voice”; that is, another relationship the subject of the verb can have to the action of the verb. When the subject of the verb is itself represented as the direct recipient of the action of the verb, the verb is in the “passive voice”. In English, the formation of the passive voice is a little clumsy: we use the third principal part of the verb and use it as a passive participle; then we use the verb “to be” in an inflected form as the auxiliary. Like this with the verb “see, saw, seen”.

Present: I am seen.

Present Progressive: I am being seen.

Future: I will be seen.

Imperfect: I was being seen.

Can you detect this pattern: inflected form for the verb “to be” plus the passive participle of the verb you’re conjugating. Notice that the verb “to be” is doing all the work.

THE PASSIVE VOICE OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM IN LATIN

By contrast, the formation of the passive voice in the present system in Latin is a marvel of simplicity. To begin with, which principal part of the verb do you think the passive voice in the present system will be built upon? If you guessed the first principal part, you did well. Remember, the Latin present, future, and imperfect tenses are formed off the first principal part, regardless of the voice. Next the verb endings you’re

familiar with are the active voice personal endings for the present system. Logically, therefore, it follows that there must be a set of “passive” personal endings. Here they are; watch for similarities with the active endings:

-or I am [being] -mur we are [being]
-ris [-re] you are [being] -mini you
are [being]
-tur he is [being] -ntur they are [being]

These are the endings you add to the normal stems to form the passive voice in the present system. Do you detect the similarities? Only the second person singular and plural endings are totally different from their active counterparts. Now let's take a closer look at how all of this is going to come together.

PRESENT TENSE PASSIVE FOR ALL CONJUGATIONS

The present tense in the active voice is formed simply by adding personal endings to the first principal part. (And remember, this stem includes the stem vowel: an “-a-” for first conjugation verbs, “-e-” for the second, “-e-” for the third, and “-i-” for the fourth.) To form the present tense passive, you simply replace the active personal endings with the passive endings.

The only apparently unusual form you're going to see in all this is the second person singular of third conjugation verbs. You remember that the stem vowel of a third conjugation verb is short “-e-” and that it changes when you start adding personal endings. It becomes “-i-” and “-u-”. But think back. The infinitive of third conjugation verbs isn't “-ire” but “-ere”. That's because when the short “-e-” is followed by an “-r-” it stays short

“-e-”. So what’s that going to mean for the second personal singular passive? The passive personal ending is “-rís”, so, since the ending starts with an “-r-”, the stem vowel will not change to “-i-” as you might expect, but it will remain short “-e-”. So the form will end in “-erís”, not “-írís”, as you might have expected. Write out the present tense passive of all four conjugations:

laudo moneo duco capio audio

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-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
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FUTURE TENSE PASSIVE OF ALL CONJUGATIONS

To form the future tense passive, just as in the present tense, you simply replace the active personal endings with the passive personal endings. So form the future tense of each verb, without the personal endings first, then simply attach the passive personal endings. But be careful. In the second person singular

of all conjugations except the fourth something odd is going to happen. Do you remember this rule of Latin phonetics? "When a short 'e-' is followed by an 'r-' it remains short 'e-'. So what does this mean for us? Watch this

lauda + be + ris = laudabris
 mone + be + ris = monebris

Write out the future tense passive of the paradigm verbs, and don't forget that 3rd and 4th conjugation verbs form the future tense differently from the 1st and 2nd.

laudo moneo duco capio audio

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

IMPERFECT TENSE PASSIVE OF LATIN VERBS

Follow the same procedure you did with the present and future tenses passive. Construct the imperfect tense less the personal

endings, then use the passive personal endings. The first person singular is “-bar”, where the personal ending “-r” is attached directly to the “-ba- tense sign of the imperfect, without inserting an “-o-” as you did in the present and future tenses. Write out the imperfect passive of the paradigm verbs:

laudo moneo duco capio audio

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

THE PASSIVE INFINITIVE

The present active infinitive passive is form which is also derived from the first principal part. To form the passive voice of the infinitive of first, second, and fourth conjugation verbs, you simply use the ending “-ri” instead of “-re”. In third conjugation verbs, you replace the stem vowel with “-i”.

1. lauda + ri = laudari “to be praised”
2. mone + ri = moneri “to be warned”

3. *duc* + *i* = *duci* "to be led"
- 3i. *cap* + *i* = *capi* "to be captured"
4. *audi* + *ri* = *audiri* "to be taken"

DRILLS

FIRST CONJUGATION VERB: *laudo*, -are

	PRESENT	FUTURE	IMPERFECT
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____

INFINITIVE

SECOND CONJUGATION VERB: *deleo*, -ere

PRESENT	FUTURE	IMPERFECT
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1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

INFINITIVE

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PASSIVE VOICE

What's the difference between these two sentences:

(a) George kicked the ball.

(b) The ball was kicked by George.

Obviously, in (a) the verb is active, but in (b) it is passive. But what's the difference between the active and passive voice as a matter of presentation? The action being described in both sentences is the same. Both authors are looking at the same action. What's the difference as far as the speakers' emphases are concerned? When we listen to or read English, we attach a certain

priority to the subject of the verb. So in sentence (a) the speaker (or writer) relating the event, but with the focus of his attention on what George is doing. In sentence (b), however, the principle emphasis is on what is being done to the ball, and the fact that George is the one who kick the ball is attached only as further detail.

The order of rhetorical importance begins with the subject, next comes the action performed on it, and then finally the agent who actually performed the action. The sentence would still have been a completed thought even if George's agency had not been mentioned: "The ball was kicked". Similarly, the order of priority in sentence (a) begins with the subject of the verb, then the verb, and finally the object of the action of the verb.

You've probably been told sometime in your education experience to eschew the passive voice. That's probably good advice in general, but when you do use it, make sure that your emphasis in the passive voice construction reflects the real subordination of ideas in your narrative in general. Latin tends to be more skittish of the passive voice than English is, and, as you'll see, it definitely avoided our impersonal passive constructions like "it seems that" or "it is asked that" and so on.

ABLATIVE OF PERSONAL AGENT: AB + ABLATIVE

Look at sentences (a) and (b) again. You can see how sentence (b) is really a modification of (a). The original direct object in (a) becomes the subject of the verb in (b) and the original subject of (a) is expressed by a prepositional phrase in (b) -- "by George".

In the passive voice construction in Latin, the agent of the action, if it is mentioned, is expressed by the preposition “ab” + the ablative case. Wheelock gives you a stern warning: the “Ablative of Personal Agent” is not the “Ablative of Means” (or the “Instrumental Ablative”). The “Ablative of Means” expresses the instrument with which the agent accomplished the action of the verb; the “Ablative of Personal Agent” expresses the agent itself in a passive construction.

“Nulli tyranni ab Romanis laudabantur”. (No tyrants used to be praised by the Romans.)

“Multae rosae puellis ab poetis dabuntur”. (Many roses will be given to the girls by the poets.)

But when the agent of a passive voice is not animate, then Latin uses the Ablative of Means.

“Omnes his periculis terrentur”. (Everyone is frightened by these dangers.)

“Multae urbes vi pecuniae capientur”. (Many cities will be captured by the force of money.)

But

“Omnes a malis terrentur”. (Everyone is frightened by the evil [men].)

“Multae urbes istis tyrannis capientur”. (Many cities will be captured by those tyrants.)

PASSIVE VOICE LIMITED TO TRANSITIVE VERBS

There is one other idiom you’ll have to observe. As Wheelock tells

you, the passive construction is only possible with verbs which are truly transitive: that is, which take direct objects. This makes sense. When you change the voice of a verb from the active to passive, the original direct object accusative becomes the subject nominative. Since only transitive verbs take direct object accusatives, it follows that only verbs that are transitive can have a passive voice.

(a) "Romani nullos tyrannos laudabant".

(b) "Nulli tyranni ab Romanis laudabantur".

(a) "Poetae multas rosas puellis dabunt".

(b) "Multae rosae puellis ab poetis dabuntur".

DRILLS

Change the voice of the following sentences (active to passive or passive to active):

1. Illi libri nos adiuvabunt.

2. Haec pericula vos terrebant.

3. Hi libri a discipulis meis cum celeritate legentur.

4. *Te in via videbo.*

5. *Magna ira cives movent.*

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

videor, -erī, visus sum

The passive voice of the verb “video” takes on a special meaning; one that is not entirely predictable simply by knowing the rules of translating the Latin passive voice into English. To be sure, “videor” can mean “I am seen”, but more often it comes to mean “I seem” or “I appear” and is often followed by an infinitive: “videor legere” = “I seem to be reading”. For your future reference, the third person impersonal passive of “video” -- “videtur” does not equal our popular construction “it seems”; rather it means “it seems right”. Latin never says “it seem that George is sick”; it says “George seems to be sick”.

