CHAPTER 15

"The Imperfect Indicative Active; Ablative of Time"

FORMING THE IMPERFECT TENSE

Up to this chapter, you have learned five of the six tenses of Latin verbs.
You've seen that the tenses fall into two main classes :
the present system - the tenses formed off the first principal part;
and the perfect system - the tenses which use the third and fourth principal parts.
The perfect system tenses are the perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect.
The present system tenses are the present, future, and, as you'll see now, the imperfect.
You remember that the present system works like this:

FIRST PRINCIPAL PART + TENSE SIGN + PERSONAL ENDINGS

In the present tense, there is no tense sign, so the personal endings are added directly to the first principal part.
The tense sign for the future tense is "-be-" for the first and second conjugations, but "-a-" or "-e-" for the third and fourth.
The imperfect tense also is formed precisely according to this pattern :

stem + tense sign + personal endings.

So to form the imperfect tense you need to know its tense sign and the personal endings it uses.

The tense sign for the imperfect tense is "-ba-", which is added to the lengthened stem of the first principal part.
So what do we mean by lengthened? It means that the stem vowel, if it is not already long, is made long.
This obviously applies only to the third conjugation, where the stem vowel is a short "-e-".
It becomes long "-e-".
The stem vowels of the first and second conjugations are already long - "-a-" and "-e-" - so they aren't affected by lengthening.
But something odd happens to the stem vowels of the third conjugation i-stem and the fourth conjugation. Their stems vowels lengthen to "-ie-" before the tense sign "-ba-".
Finally, the imperfect tense uses the alternative ending "-m" in place of "-o" for the first person singular ending.
This makes some sense.
Suppose the imperfect were to use "-o" for the first person singular. What would happen?
Well, think back: what happens in the first person singular of first conjugation verbs, whose stem vowel is long "-a-"? The "-a-" elides with the "-o-" and is lost: "lauda + o = laudo".
Now if the imperfect were to use "-o" instead of "-m", the same thing would happen and the ending of the verb would be "-bo", which is the same as the future.
So, perhaps to avoid confusion, the imperfect tense uses the "-m". Enough on that.
So here, then, is the formula for forming the imperfect tense, with notes on the things to remember.

FIRST PRINCIPAL PART + ba + PERSONAL ENDINGS

(1)   the stem vowel lengthens;
(2)   the stem vowel for third i-stem and fourth conjugation verbs is "-ie-";
(3)   the first person singular ending is "-m".

Now conjugate the imperfect tense for the four conjugations.
(Check your work on page 70 of Wheelock.)

1	2	3	3i	4
laudo	moneo	duco	capio	audio
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

THE MEANING OF THE IMPERFECT TENSE

I told you back in Chapter 12 that there is a good reason the present, future, and imperfect are all collected together under one system - the present system. Now I'll show you why.
All three tenses have an aspect of incompleteness about them; a sense that the action they're describing is in a state of going-on.
With the simple future, obviously, the action can't be thought of as having been already finished. Then it wouldn't be in the future.
The present, too, is used to talk about something that is going on right as we're talking about it.
There's something about the stem of these tenses that infects them with this notion of unfulfillment, of continuation, rather than perfection or completeness.

The imperfect tense, too, although it refers to a past action which, presumably, has already been completed by the time the speaker is talking about it - the imperfect tense, too, indicates an action that was going on in the past over a length time, or that occurred again and again in the past, and hence is not viewed by the speaker as ever having reached a definite point of completion.
Let's look at some examples of the English imperfect tense; you'll have an instinctive sense for the imperfective idea in the verbs, but try to develop some consciousness about it.

> A. Even though the game still was going on, I left the stadium.
> B. David always used to like to go to the zoo.
> C. She would always come on Tuesdays.

In example A, contrast the imperfect tense "was going on", with the preterit "left".
The fact that "I left" is viewed by the speaker as an action that had a definite end; it's something he did in a finite amount of time and something he completed.
The fact that the game was still going on, however, is viewed as the general context in which he performed the action of leaving. The game was going on before he left, and, presumably, it continued to go on after he left. The game is viewed as an action with no explicitly conceived beginning and no definite end. Now, of course, the game did start at some definite time in the past, and it's probably over by now, but the way the speaker chose to represent it for his own needs was as an action that extended over an indefinite period of time. In another context he might say, "The game started at 3:30 and ended at 7:00". The point is, there's nothing "inherently" imperfective about the game; the speaker's portrayal of it will make it either perfect or imperfect.

In examples B and C, we have something slightly different.
Here English expressions "used to like" and "would come" are indicating things which occurred repeatedly in the past. The Latin imperfect has this sense as well. Because a repeated or habitual

action also has the sense of incompleteness - he or she never stopped doing whatever he or she used to do - the imperfect tense is also used to express this meaning : repeated or habitual action.

Another use of the Latin imperfect is to show a "state of being" something was in the past :
"He was six feet tall" or "I was able to see". Here the sense of continuity is almost a part of the meaning of the verbs.
When you say "He was", you're generally talking about something that had some duration in the past: "He was six feet tall". This is why the imperfect tense of the Latin verbs "sum" and "possum" are used much more frequently than the perfects "fui" and "potui". Still, in actual practice, the differences between "eram" and "fui", "poteram" and "potui" are often imperceptible.
  So let's gather our wits about the imperfect in Latin.

 (1) It's formed from the lengthened stem of the first principal part.
   The tense sign is "-ba-", and it uses the "-m" ending for the first person singular.
 (2) It's used to talk about an action in the past which the writer perceives as going on for sometime when another action occurred. Here our English equivalent might be the preterit of "to be" plus the present participle: "was looking", "were flying", etc. e.g., "It was raining hard in Frisco."
 (3) It's also used to talk about a repeated or habitual action in the past. Our English translations might be "used" plus the present infinitive, or "would". e.g. "George used to go to the park on Tuesdays"; "George would go to the park on Tuesdays".
 (4) It's also used to talk about a state of being in the past. For this reason the verbs which tell you the condition of someone or something in the past are usually in the imperfect tense.
   e.g., *"Magister discipulos docere non poterat"* (The teacher couldn't teach his students).
   "Meae filiae pulchrae erant" (My daughters were beautiful).

English has a variety of ways of expressing the Latin imperfect tense, as you can see in these three examples. The different ways are not identical, and you'll have to decide which is best by looking at the context of the Latin imperfect.

DRILLS

Translate the following short sentences.

1. Patres suos filios amabant. _____

2. Eram stultus. _____

3. Tyrannus mortem timebat. _____

4. Rex ista pericula vicit. _____

5. Rex ista pericula vincebat. _____

6. You (pl.) were not with me. _____

7. We could not see him. _____

8. The king was speaking for a long time.

             _____

9. The gods used to give men freedom.

             _____

10. Caesar himself would always run in these roads.

             _____

ABLATIVE OF TIME : WHEN AND WITHIN WHICH

As you saw in the last chapter, the ablative case can either be used with a governing preposition or by itself.

When there is a preposition, the ablative poses no special problems per se. You simply translate the preposition and then the noun. The meaning of the preposition overrides any special senses attached to the ablative case.

(The one preposition, however, you need to watch out for is "*cum*", which can either mean "with" in the sense of accompaniment or "with" in the sense of manner.)

The only use of the ablative case without a preposition you know so far is the instrumental ablative or ablative of means.

Another prepositionless use of the ablative case is called the **Ablative of Time**.

You can easily spot such a use in Latin.

If you see a noun in the ablative case which is not governed by a preposition, and if the noun is some unit of time, then you have an Ablative of Time.

But what makes this use of the ablative beastly difficulty for English speaking students is not the Latin, but the variety of English translations we can use to represent the Latin expression of time.

You see, Latin has one construction - a noun expressing a unit of time in the ablative case - and English has two ways of translating it, and they both mean something quite different.

We call the construction in Latin the **Ablative** of **Time When** or **Time Within Which**, not because Latin has two different construction, but because English does, and when we translate the Latin construction into English, we have to choose which of the two English construction best fits the context.

Let's start by looking at some English expressions of time which use prepositions.

1. "They'll be here in an hour".
2. "They came on Tuesday".
3. "In less than five minutes they were all gone".
4. "Snow never falls in the summer".
5. "It'll be snowing in a couple of months".
6. "At that time in human history, there were no alarm clocks".
7. "Within a couple of hours, Caesar had conquered all of Asia".
8. "In the Middle Ages, things were different".

I don't doubt that you had no trouble understanding these sentences and recognizing, in particular, the meaning of the expressions of time. You don't have to scratch your heads and puzzle over them because their exact meanings are embedded unconsciously in your linguistic repertoire.

But to translate the Latin Ablative of Time, you must force yourself to understand consciously what these different expressions of time are telling you.

Despite the variety of lexical forms, these expressions of time above fall into only two classes.

Let's try something.

Before I try to explain the different expressions to you, read these sentences carefully and try to divide them into two groups based on their expressions of time.

Trust your instincts.

Hints :

(1)   don't rely solely on the prepositions to tell you the differences (some prepositions can be used in both expressions of time);

(2)   there are an equal number of sentences in each group. Give it a shot (but you'd probably better use pencil). Put all the sentences that have temporal expressions like that of sentence #1 into Class A; all those like that of sentence #2 into Class B

CLASS A

1. "They'll be here in an hour".

2.

3.

4.
CLASS B

1. "They came on Tuesday".

2.

3.

4.

How did you do?
The answer is that the odd numbered sentences comprise one category of expressions of time, and the even numbered another.
You undoubtedly did fairly well at this exercise, again, because your native feel for English helped you "sense" the differences and similarities, even though you might not be able to explain your reasons to a non-native speaker of English.
If you made errors, correct them now.

Now let's do the tough work.
Precisely what is the difference between the temporal expressions in Classes A and B?
Well, imagine that a foreign student of English is asking you this question. How would you answer it?
Try. It's hard, isn't it? Let's give it a try.

The expressions of time in Class A involve a duration of time but with a definite beginning or end to the action clearly in mind.
Sentence #1 tells you that it'll will be another hour (the duration of time) before they start being here (start of something).
Sentence #2 tells you that it took an hour (duration of time), but they finally did leave (end of something). And so on with the rest in Class A.

Now notice that the prepositions "in" or "within" can both be used in this kind of expression.
That would present no problem, if it weren't for the fact that "in" can be used in the other kind of temporal expression, too.
Look at the examples under Class B; you'll see "in" used there, too.
The way to tell whether "in" is being used in the sense of Class A is to try to replace it with the preposition "within".
If the sentence still makes good English idiom, then "in" means time in the sense explained above.
This is why we call this expression of time "Time Within Which", because the English preposition "within" always connotes the proper sense.

> WORKS: "I'll see you in two days"   =   "I'll see you within two days".
> DOESN'T WORK: "It rains in the summer"   ~   "It rains within the summer".

How about Class B; how would you explain the meaning of the expressions of time here?
These expression tell you the time at which something is, was or will be taking place.
There is no implied sense of the duration of the action with an emphasis on it beginning or its end.
This is why we call it "Time When".

"I teach Latin on Monday" simply identifies the time I teach as if it were a single point on a time line. Again, English has a variety of prepositions it uses to express this kind of time, as you can see : "See me on Monday at five o'clock in the afternoon".

Okay, so much for English. Remember, the reason we looked at all this was that these two different expression of time in English can both be used for one expression of time in Latin : the prepositionless ablative case. What you have to do when you're translating from Latin to English is decide which English expression is the more appropriate. So let's look at the Latin.

Consider the following Latin sentences.
Try to decide how best to translate the expression of time into English :
"Paucis horis Caesar in Asiam venit". Which would be best: "within a few hours" or "at, on, or in a few hours"? Undoubtedly "within (or in) a few hours" is the better here. Not "At a few hours, Caesar went into Asia", but "In (or within) a few hours, Caesar went into Asia".
Next : *"Aetate pueri ludebant"* ("ludo" = to play). "Within the summer" or "in the summer"?
The last, obviously, since it can be thought to answer the question "time when", not "time within which".
One last example : *"Una hora Asiam totam vici"*. Is this telling time "within which" or "time when"?
Certainly "time within which" because there's a sense of duration of time with a terminus of the action in mind: "I conquered all Asia within (or in) one hour".

I know that some of these distinctions can be rather hair splitting.
You just have to work with them a lot and keep you mind in high gear at all times.
Here is one last test you can use to decide whether an expression of time is a Time When or Time Within Which construction.
> Try to rephrase the sentence in question in the following way:
>> "It takes (or took or will take) X Y Z"
> [Where X is the subject of the original sentence; Y is the expression of time, and Z is the infinitive of the original conjugated verb.]
If the resulting sentence preserves the meaning of the original sentence, then the expression of time is Time Within Which.
> "In three years I'll be out of this place" = "It will take me three years to be out of this place".
The rewritten sentence means the same thing as the original sentence, so "in three years" is an expression of Time Within Which.
"In the cenozoic era, dinosaurs walked on the earth" ~ "It took dinosaurs the cenozoic era to walk on the earth". The rewritten sentence does not mean the same thing as the original sentence, therefore, "in the cenozoic era" is not an expression of Time Within Which, but Time When.

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

miser, -a, -um You haven't seen an adjective like this for a while. It uses the case endings of the first and second declensions, but in place of the "-us" ending for the masculine nominative singular, it uses the other ending "-er". Is the "-e-" of "-er" part of the stem?

iacio There is nothing terribly unusual about this verb. It's a normal third conjugation i-stem.
The tricky part comes in recognizing it in a compound verb (when a prefix is attached to t).
The first principal part loses the vowel "-a-" altogether: "e + iacio = eicio", which is pronounced "eh YI ki oh".
In the third principal part, the vowel returns, but this time as the long "-e-", which is the normal vowel for the third principal part: "e + ieci = eieci", which is pronounced "eh YEAH kee.

inter + acc. It means either "among or between", so we need to fret over which is the best English translation. Do you remember when standard English calls for "among" and when "between"? Use "between" with two objects; "among" for three or more. "This is a secret just between you and me". "This is a secret we keep among the family members only".

1/08/93