**Some Impersonal Verbs**

When we refer to an impersonal verb in Latin, we are referring to a verb in the third person singular which has, as its subject, an infinitive or accusative and infinitive construction. When translated into English, however, an impersonal phrase is signaled by the use of the pronoun “it” (with no referent) as the subject of the impersonal phrase.

Cōnstābat esse deōs.

“It was agreed that they were gods.”

(literally, “That they were gods was agreed.”)

When the Latin subject is expressed by an infinitive without a subject accusative, the subject is conveyed in English as an infinitive. When the subject is expressed by an accusative and infinitive construction, the subject is usually conveyed in English with a subordinate clause introduced by the subordinating conjuction “that”.

Nōbīs nōn licet hoc dīcere. “It is not permitted for us to say this.”

Appārēbat omne discrīmen adesse. “It seemed that a general crisis was at hand.”

The use of the Latin infinitive in impersonal constructions follows the usual rules of tense for infinitives in indirect statements, with the present infinitive indicating time same as the impersonal verb, the perfect infinitive indicating time prior, and the future infinitive used to depict subsequent time.

Also, like in indirect statements, infinitive or accusative and infinitive used in this way can have dependent elements (a direct object, a prepositional phrase, etc.) all of which make up the subject of the impersonal verb.

Nihil ex tantā urbe relinquī superīs placet.

“It is pleasing to the gods that nothing from so great a city to remain.”

The meaning of each impersonal verb is often specific to its impersonal usage. In this lesson, one impersonal meaning is given for each verb, though other suitable meanings may also be found by consulting a lexicon.

Some impersonal verbs include: **appāret** (“it appears”), **cōnstat** (“it is agreed”), **liquet** (“it is clear”), **praestat** (“it is preferable”).

Pompēium mihi amīcissimum esse cōnstat.

“It is agreed that Pompeius is most loyal to me.”

Appāruit eī senātum nōn taedēre bellī.

“It appeared to him that the Senate did not tire of war.”

Some verbs, when used impersonally, usually have only an infinitive as their subject (not an accusative and infinitive). These same verbs often takes an accusative direct object (sometimes called the accusative of the person affected). These verbs include: **decet** or **dēdecet** (“it befits”), **dēlectat** (“it delights”), **iuvat** (“it pleases”), **oportet** (“it behooves”).

Ōrātōrem īrascī minimē decet. “It least of all befits the orator to be angry.”

Mē potius nescīre iuvābat. “It pleased me more not to know.”

The accusative object of oportet is often translated into English as if it were the subject of the verb, with oportet then translated as either “ought” or “must”.

Mē ad vōs venīre oportet. “I must come to you.”

(literally, “It behooves me to come to you.”)

Some verbs when used impersonally have either an infinitive or an accusative and infinitive as their subject and may also have an accompanying dative (sometimes called the dative of the person concerned) indicating the person (or thing) for whom the verbal action is of a relevant interest. Impersonal verbs which may have an accompanying dative of the person concerned include: **condūcit** (“it serves... well”), **expedit** (“it is useful”), **licet** (“it is permitted”), **obest** (“it is harmful”), **prōdest** (“it benefits”), **placet** (“it is pleasing”), **displicet** (“it is displeasing”) **libet** (“it is pleasing”), **vidētur** (“it seems best”).

Prōfuit multīs capī. “It has benefited many to be capture.”

Liceat mihi vēra referre. “May it be permitted to me to report true words.”

Patriae condūcit habēre cīvēs piōs in parentēs.

“It serves the country well to posses citizens dutiful toward their parents.”

The dative with placet and displicet is often translated into English as if it were the subject of the verb, with placet translated as “like” and displicet translated as “dislike”.

Mihi placet temptāre animī tuī firmitātem. “I like to test the strength of your mind.”

(literally, “To test the strength of your mind is pleasing to me.”)

In addition to these verbs, a neuter singular adjective paired with est can take an infinitive or accusative and infinitive as its subject. In some cases, these phrases may be accompanied by a dative of the person concerned. Some such phrases include: **difficile est** (“it is difficult”), **melius est** (“it is better”), **dulce est** (“it is sweet”), **certum est** (“it is determined” or more often “X has decided” where X is a person expressed by the dative).

Nātūram ipsam dēfīnīre difficile est. “It is difficult to define nature itself.”

Melius est vitia vitiīs nōn oppōnere. “It is better not to combat vices with vices.”

Certum est Pompēiō esse in Hispāniā. “Pompey has decided to be in Spain.”

(literally, “It is determined for Pompey to be in Spain.”)

An infinitive or accusative and infinitive construction can express the subject with some other periphrastic phrases, including: **fās est** (“it is right”), **nefās est** (“it is impious”), **necesse est** (“it is necessary”), **opus est** (“there is need”). These periphrastic phrases may be accompanied by a dative of the person concerned.

Vōs fallere mihi nōn fās est. “It is not right for you to deceive me.”

Nefās est tendere adversus auctōritātem senātūs.

“It is impious to strive against the authority of the Senate.”

Hoc fierī opus est. “There is a need for this to happen.”

Opus est, however, commonly takes a lone ablative object (ie. Exhortātiōne nōn opus est. “There is no need for exhortation.”).

**Some additional notes**

Other subjects found with impersonal verbs sometimes include: a neuter singular pronoun, an indirect question, or a ut clause with a subjunctive verb.

Hoc maximē reī pūblicae condūcit. “This serves the Republic especially well.”

Priscī Tarquiniī fīlius nepōsne fuerit parum liquet.

“It is insufficient clear whether he was the son or grandson of Tarquinius Priscus.”

Opus est ut hīc aliquot diēs maneās.

“There is need for you to remain here for several days.”

The subject of some impersonal verbs (in particular oportet, licet, necesse est, and opus est) is frequently expressed lone subjunctive verb.

Necesse est sciās. “It is necessary that you know.”

Rectius vivat oportet. “It is necessary for him to live rightly.”

or “He must live rightly.”

Certain neuter adjectives accompanying est instead have a noun clause of result as the subject, including reliquum est, cōnsequēns est, etc. (see Lesson 17)

**Activity – Identify the underlined accusative forms as one of the following: direct object of the infinitive, direct object of the impersonal verb, accusative subject of the infinitive, predicate accusative.**

Sample: Oportet pāstōrem pascere pinguēs ovēs. Answer: direct object of the impersonal verb

Sample: Licet nēminī dūcere exercitum contrā patriam. Answer: direct object of the infinitive

Sample: Tē liquet esse meum. Answer: predicate accusative

Sample: Appāret mihi hās arborēs neglegī. Answer: accusative subject of the infinitive

Nōbīs licet spērāre hoc.

Mē iuvat tālēs vōcēs audīre.

Appāret iam ventōs dēsinere.

Liquet eam esse deam.

Iuvat īre et vidēre lītus relictum.

Scrībere plūra mihi libet.

Decēbat tē ūtī eīs verbīs.

Eum ā mē dēfendī fās est.

Quid iuvat esse deum?

Decet novercam dare haec dōna.

Quid tē dēlectat agere aliēnum negōtium?

Pācem nōn futūram esse diūturnam appārēbat.

Omnibus bonīs expedit rem pūblicam esse salvam.

Meō studiō expedīvit lūmen abesse.

Praestat compōnere mōtōs fluctūs.

**Activity – Using impersonal verbs from this lesson, provide a correct infinitive for the context, in the correct tense.**

Sample:” It appears that the revolt did not possess little strength.” (habeō) Answer: habuisse

Sample: “It does no harm to mention this.” (dīcō) Answer: dīcere

Sample: “It seemed best to attack secretly at night.” (ingredior) Answer: ingredī

Sample: “It appeared that the Sabines (m.) would provoke them.” (moveō) Answer: mōtūrōs esse

“It is difficult to deny.” (negō)

“It is right even to be taught by one’s enemy.” (doceō)

“It profits the state to have citizens who are obedient toward their parents.” (habeō)

“It was necessary to obey the Senate.” (pāreō)

“It was agreed that this number had come against the camps.” (veniō)

‘It is beneficial to know our own illnesses.” (sciō)

‘It appeared that he would rule.” (rēgnō)

“It is agreed that they were the Horatii and the Curiatii.” (sum)

“It is necessary for no one to pursue prosperity at a run.” (sequor)

“It is agreed that plots (f.) were attempted.” (faciō)

“It is not right for you to deceive me.” (fallō)

“He disliked dwelling here.” (habitō)

“It was clear that he would speak in defense of himself.” (dīcō)

“It will be clear that the world is governed by providence.” (regō)

“I like for nothing to be left out.” (praetermittō)

**Simple Sentences - Translate the following sentences using grammar from this lesson.**

Hoc fierī opus est.

Dulce est dolōrem reddere.

Mē potius nescīre iuvābat.

Dē rē pūblicā nōn libet plūra scrībere.

Illīs nōn expediēbat fallere Rōmānōs.

Quid prōdest oculōs hominum aurēsque vītāre?

Certum est mihi vēra fatērī.

Nōn dīcam id quod probāre difficile est.

Cōnstat inter omnēs eum esse sapiēntissimum.

Accipere praestat quam facere iniūriam.

**Examples in Context - Translate the following modified examples.**

n) Context for the sentence(s)

original Latin text (citation)

Modified example sentence(s)

[grammatical and contextual notes, if any]

1) Publilia’s family is attempting to recover the dowry from Cicero after their brief marriage.

apparebat enim illas litteras non esse ipsius (Epistulae ad Atticum 12.32)

Appārēbat illās litterās nōn esse ipsīus.

[ipsīus, refers to Publilia, here meaning “in her own hand”]

2) A sudden change in winds brings safety to Caesar’s fleet (and peril to his foe).

Hic subitam commutationem fortunae videre licuit. (Commentarii de Bellum Civile 3.27)

Hīc subitam commūtātiōnem fortūnae vidēre licuit.

3) Seneca advises Lucilius to always act as if some famous person of virtue is present.

Prodest sine dubio custodem sibi inposuisse (Epistulae Morales 25.5)

Prōdest sine dubiō custōdem sibi inpōsuisse.

4) Livy reports a marvelous occurence.

et in agro Campano bovem locutum esse satis constabat. (Ab urbe condita 41.21)

In agrō Campānō bovem locūtum esse satis cōnstābat.

[Campānō, “Campanian”]

5) Caesar recounts the remarkable animals dwelling in the Hercynian forest in Germania.

multaque in ea genera ferarum nasci constat (Commentarii de Bello Gallico 6.25.5)

Multa genera ferārum in eā silvā nāscī cōnstat.

[nascī, inf. from the deponent nascor]

6) Hypermestra defends opting out of the slaughter perpetrated by her sisters, the Danaids, who acted under the instruction of their father Danaus.

esse ream praestat, quam sic placuisse parenti; (Heroides 14.7)

Praestat esse ream quam sīc placuisse parentī.

[ream, here “accused”; quam, begins a comparison after the verb praestat]

7) Apollo laments the death of Hyacinthus.

atque utinam tecumque mori vitamque liceret reddere! (Metamorphoses 10.202)

Utinam tēcumque morī vītamque reddere licēret!

[Utinam… licēret, an unfulfilled wish, translated “would that...!” (see Section 7); reddere, here perhaps “surrender” or “offer as payment”]

8) Seneca remarks on the ever-changing nature of fortune.

Ita fato placuit, nullius rei eodem semper loco stare fortunam. (Consolatio ad Helviam 7.10)

Ita fātō placuit fortūnam nūllīus reī eōdem in locō semper stāre.

[reī, here “affair” or “matter”]

9) Camillus speaks against those wishing to relocate to Veii after the Gallic sack of Rome, here citing religious grounds for his objection.

flamini Diali noctem unam manere extra urbem nefas est. (Ab urbe condita 5.52)

Flāminī Diālī noctem ūnam manēre extrā urbem nefās est.

[Flāminī Diālī, dat. “Flamen Dialis” a priest of Jupiter; noctem ūnam, acc. duration of time “for”; extrā, preposition with the accusative]

10) Caesar’s attempts to rebuild a bridge is simultaneously impeded by nature and his foe.

atque erat difficile eodem tempore rapidissimo flumine opera perficere et tela vitare. (Commentarii de Bello Civili 1.50)

Erat difficile eōdem tempore rapidissimō flūmine opera perficere et tēla vītāre.

[rapidissimō flūmine, ablative of cause]

11) The Gallic commander Ambiorix bates the Romans into charging and exposing portions of the battle line to attack.

interim eam partem nudari necesse erat et ab latere aperto tela recipi. (Commentarii de de Bello Gallico 5.35.2)

Interim eam partem nūdārī necesse erat et ab latere apertō tēla recipī.

[eam partem, referring to part of the battle line; recipī, passive infinitive]

12) Aeneas encourages his comrades after they are shipwreck on an unknown land.

revocate animos, maestumque timorem mittite: forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit. (Aeneid 1.202-3)

Revocāte animōs, maestumque timōrem mittite: forsan et haec ōlim meminisse iuvābit.

[mittite, here “send away”; forsan, “perhaps”]

13) Cicero pleads with Atticus for help in bringing an end to his exile.

mi Pomponi, pugna ut tecum et cum meis mihi liceat vivere et scribe ad me omnia. (Epistulae ad Atticum 3.22)

Mī Pompōnī, pugnā ut tēcum et cum meīs mihi liceat vīvere et scrībe ad mē omnia.

[Mī Pompōnī, vocative singular, for the form see Lesson 16; Pomponius was Atticus’ family name; pugna, imperative parallel to scrībe; meīs, here substantive for “my family” or similar]

14) Juno announces her plan to bring destruction upon her rival Semele.

ipsa petenda mihi est; ipsam, si maxima Iuno rite vocor, perdam, si me gemmantia dextra sceptra tenere decet. (Metamorphoses 3.263-5)

Ipsam perdam, sī maxima Iūnō rīte vocor, sī mē gemmantia scēptra dextrā manū tenēre decet.

[Ipsam, Semele; perdam, future tense verb from perdō]

15) Dido wishes she could live a life without blame, as animals do.

non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine vitam degere more ferae, talis nec tangere curas (Aeneid 4.550)

Nōn licuit mē expertem thalamī vītam sine crīmine degere mōre ferae .

[expertem, modifies mē, takes an objective genitive “having no experience of” (see Lesson 4); degere, with vītam “lead a life”]