

ORATIO OBLIQUA: ACCUSATIVE WITH INFINITIVE

A common construction in Latin is the indirect statement (*oratio obliqua*)—reported speech or thought, in contrast to direct quotation (*oratio recta*). It is expressed by a dependent noun clause whose verb is an **infinitive** and whose subject is an **accusative**. This construction is generally translated into English with a subordinate clause beginning *that* and containing a finite verb, although literary English occasionally uses a similar construction, e.g. Henry James, “Maud-Evelyn”: “as soon as she came in, I saw *her to be* much excited.” Note that the subordinate conjunction, *that*, is **not** expressed in *oratio obliqua*—it is a feature of English, not Latin. Such clauses are most often used:

1. as the **subject** of impersonal verbs like *constat*, ‘it is agreed,’ *apparet*, ‘it is apparent,’ *manifestum est*, ‘it is evident.’
 - a. *Constat Romam non sine labore conditam esse.* *That* Rome was not built without labor is agreed. It is agreed *that* Rome was not built without labor.
 - b. *Apparet fratrem virum validum esse.* *That* (your) brother is a strong man is apparent. It is apparent *that* (your) brother is a strong man.
 - c. *Manifestum ignem calidum esse.* *That* fire is hot is evident. It is evident *that* fire is hot.
2. as the **object** after active verbs of *saying, thinking, knowing, perceiving, etc.*
 - a. *Dixit feminam puerum amare.* He said *that* the girl loved the boy.
 - b. *Intellego nautas villam perdidisse.* I understand *that* the sailors destroyed the villa.
 - c. *Vidimus famam reginae esse magnam.* We saw *that* the queen’s reputation was great.

TENSES OF THE INFINITIVE. The tenses of the Latin infinitive do not indicate time absolutely but only in reference to the verb on which they depend. Thus, the *present* infinitive indicates a *contemporaneous* action, the *perfect* infinitive a *prior* action, and the *future* infinitive a *subsequent* action.

1. *Nautam in Italia esse dicit.* He **says** that the sailor **is** in Italy.
2. *Nautam in Italia esse dixit.* He **said** that the sailor **was** in Italy (When?—at the time of his speaking.)
3. *Nautam in Italia fuisse dicit.* He **says** that the sailor **was (has been)** in Italy (When?—before his speaking.)
4. *Nautam in Italia fuisse dixit.* He **said** that the sailor **had been** in Italy (When?—before his speaking.)
5. *Nautam in Italia futurum esse dicit.* He **says** that the sailor **will be** in Italy (When?—subsequent to his speaking.)
6. *Nautam in Italia futurum esse dixit.* He **said** that the sailor **would be** in Italy (When?—subsequent to his speaking.)
7. *Nautam in Italia futurum esse dixerat.* He **had said** that the sailor **would be** in Italy (When?—subsequent to his speaking.)
8. *Nautam in Italia futurum fuisse dixit.* He **said** that the sailor **would have been** in Italy. Note that this last example is somewhat more complicated and less common. It expresses an *Unreal Condition*, i.e., the sailor would have been in Italy, but he’s not for some reason or other. . .

PASSIVES OF ‘SAYING’ AND ‘PERCEIVING’ Note that Latin uses passive verbs like *dicitur* personally, not impersonally. For instance, a sentence like, “It is said that the sailor is strong,” is not expressed in Latin with *oratio obliqua* but with a predicate adjective: *Dicitur vir validus esse*. “The man is said to be strong (validus is a predicate adjective agreeing in case, number and gender with *vir*. *Dicitur virum validum esse* is **bad Latin**. Likewise, “It seems that the man is a poet,” would be written, *Videtur poeta vir esse* (*vir* is a predicate nominative), not *Poetam virum esse videtur*.