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THE DATIVE WITH CERTAIN INTRANSITIVE VERBS

From time immemorial the schoolboy has conscientiously learned that "many verbs signifying to *favor, help, please, trust* (and their contraries), to *believe, persuade, command, obey, serve, resist, envy, threaten, pardon* and *spare* take the dative," and it seems somewhat like sacrilege to lay violent hands on this time-honored rule. But I am sure that every teacher of Latin composition will bear me out in saying that it is the perennial source of confusion and difficulty.

In the first place, having burdened his mind with a list of from fourteen to eighteen English verbs, the average student seems to have reached the limit of endurance for a single rule. Even though he may have noticed in passing that the statement begins "*Many* verbs," and that there are some exceptions, as a matter of fact these latter observations make little impression upon him. Ask for the rule, and in nine cases out of ten it will be given without the qualifying adjective "many." And, indeed, it does seem somewhat like adding insult to injury to ask a boy to learn this long list of verbs and then, when he has done so, to keep nagging him because the one verb of "aiding" with which he is familiar (*iuvo*) and a common verb of "injuring" (*laedo*) demand the accusative case.

The second count against the rule is even more damaging; namely, that the English verbs which appear in the list represent very imperfectly the meanings of the Latin verbs which the rule is designed to cover; in fact, in some cases at least, the English translation only serves to conceal the reason why the Latin verb is construed with the dative, and can hardly fail to leave the impression that, in some mysterious way, *ideas* which to the English mind are transitive appeared to the Roman as intransitive. How inexact and misleading the translations are may be clearly illustrated in the case of *opitulator* and *servio*, which are representatives of two different types of verb.

a) *Opitulator* is in sense a compound, containing within itself the notion of a transitive verb and its object. Such a conception of the meaning of the word must have been impressed upon the mind of the Roman by the fact that the phrase *opem ferre* was in good use;¹ e. g.:

Cic. *Fam.* v. 4. 2: *Quodsi mihi tua clementia opem tuleris, omnibus in rebus me fore in tua potestate tibi confirmo.*

¹ This factor is even more important than the *formal* derivation of the word in determining its current force.

Cic. *Cat.* iii. 8. 18: tum vero ita praesentes (sc. di immortales) his temporibus *opem et auxilium nobis tulerunt* ut eos paene oculis videre possemus.¹

Suet. *Galb.* 20: Illud mirum admodum fuerit neque praesentium quemquam *opem imperatori ferre* conatum et. . . .

The real meaning of *opitulator* was therefore something like "lend aid," and the reason for the dative used with it is obvious.

b) *Servio* is a neuter verb, equivalent to a noun and the copula (*servus + esse*). The literal normal force of the word appears most clearly in early Latin; e.g.:

Plaut. *Capt.* 119, 120:

Omnes profecto *liberi* lubentius
Sumus quam *servimus*.

Plaut. *Mil. glor.* 1356, 1357:

Et si ita sententia esset, *tibi servire* malui
Multo quam *alii libertus esse*.

In both these passages the antithesis of *liber (libertus) esse* makes it perfectly evident that, for Plautus, *servio* was only another way of saying *servus esse*. Since therefore this verb signified "be a slave" or "be in bondage," the reason for the dative used with it is not far to seek. That this conception of the meaning of *servio* persisted down to classical times may be seen from the following passages:²

Cic. *De orat.* i. 52. 226: Potestne virtus, Crassus, *servire* . . . ? quae et semper et sola *libera est*, quaeque, etiamsi corpora *capta sint armis* aut *constricta vinculis*, tamen *suum ius atque* . . . *libertatem tenere* debeat.

Cic. *Cleunt.* 53. 146: Legum ministri (sc. sunt) magistratus . . . , *legibus* denique idcirco omnes *servimus*, ut *liberi esse* possimus.³

Cic. *Phil.* ii. 26. 64: Una in illa re *servitutis* oblita civitas ingemuit, *servientibus*-que animis . . . gemitus tamen populi Romani *liber juit*.⁴

¹ Other Ciceronian examples are *Verr.* II. ii. 3. 9 (*opem auxiliumque ferretis*), II. v. 57. 147 (*opem et salutem tulit*), *Rab. Perd.* i. 3. (*ferre opem*), *Sulla* 29. 82 (*nihil adiumenti, nihil opis, nihil auxilii ferri*), *Arch.* i. 1 (*opitulari* . . . *opem et salutem ferre*), *Dom.* 10. 27 (*opem et auxilium tulisset*), *Lig.* 10.30 (*fer opem*), *Phil.* ix. 1. 2 (*opem ferre*), *Fin.* ii. 35. 118 (*opem salutemque ferres*), *Tusc. dis.* iv. 20. 46 (*ad opem ferendam*), iv. 26. 56 (*feras opem*), *Leg.* ii. 11. 28 (*ad opem ferendam*), iii. 19. 43 (*opem ferre*). Cf. *Auct. ad Her.* iv. 27. 37, which shows a marked variety of expression (*Nihil . . . auxiliatae sunt, nihil . . . adiumento juit, nihil . . . praesidii tulit, nihil . . . opitulata est*) and [Cic.] *Pr. quam in exil.* 7. 16 (*opem non tuleritis*).

² A sympathetic appreciation of the force of such a verb as this is difficult for the English mind. For when the noun force stands out as it does here in the case of *servio*, our present usage (unlike that of Anglo-Saxon) demands that the copula and a noun be used (e. g., "be a slave")—no simple verb conveys just this shade of thought. But Greek and Latin agree with Anglo-Saxon in including such conceptions within the field of meaning of simple verb forms; e. g., βασιλεύω with genitive="be king (βασιλεύς) of," and δουλεύω with dative="be a slave (δούλος) to."

³ The fundamental force of *servio* is so clear in this passage that inferior manuscripts alter the reading to *legum* . . . *servi sumus*.

⁴ So, with a reference to Caesar's unlimited power, Cicero says *qui servire volebant* (*Phil.* ii. 14. 35) and, referring to the claims of the Triumvirs, *neque iam, quominus serviamus, recusamus*, (*Att.* ii. 18. 1). Again, the antithesis in a sentence like the following is illuminating; *cum is, qui imperat aliis, servit ipse*

The evidence therefore regarding *opitulator* and *servio* abundantly sustains the second charge brought against the rule, namely that, in some cases at least,¹ the English verbs enumerated in the list provide translations so inexact that they actually obscure the reason for the use of the dative with the Latin verbs which the rule is designed to cover—thus involving in needless perplexity and misunderstanding a subject otherwise comparatively plain and simple. On this ground alone we might well question the utility of retaining the old rule; but when, in addition, it is noted (as above) that, considered as a mere mechanical formula, the rule breaks down in actual practice because of the important “exceptions” which the student fails to master, it would certainly seem that the time had come to introduce into our grammars a wholly different method of dealing with this subject.

The most simple and direct solution of the problem in hand would seem to be to substitute for the English translations a corresponding list of *Latin* verbs.² So far as length of list is concerned, the plan seems feasible enough; for, in one version of the old rule, the number of English verbs runs up to eighteen, and within that limit it is quite possible to include all the Latin verbs that the student frequently meets or cares to use. The revised rule might read somewhat as follows:

Note carefully that *credo, javeo, fido, ignosco, impero, invideo, irascor, minor, noceo, opitulator, parco, pareo, persuadeo, placeo, resisto, servio, and suscenseo*³ are INTRANSITIVE verbs.

nulli cupiditati (Rep. i. 34. 52); cf. *servis . . . regnas* (Phil. ii. 14. 35). Still again, an interesting parallel is afforded by *alios gloriae servire* (Tusc. dis. v. 3. 9) and *multos libidinum servos* (ibid. ii. 4. 12). Cf. also *Cat.* iv. 10. 22 (*oppressi serviunt*).

By a slight shift of the point of view, *servio* signifies “act as slave (to),” a shade of meaning that we lose through translating by the transitive verb “serve;” the Latin point of view is much better represented by “to minister (to);” e. g., *Off.* iii. 33. 117, *Quam miser (sc. est) virtutis famulatus servientis voluptati!* Cicero is here speaking of the Epicurean doctrine that virtue is a good only as it leads to pleasure, and the sense is “How wretched the bondage of virtue ministering to pleasure!” Cf. *Cat.* i. 9. 23.

¹ The two verbs here chosen were selected because there chanced to be abundant material at hand. A study of other verbs would doubtless yield like results—some particularly look very simple, e. g., *auxilior, comitor, famulor, gratificor, irascor, moderor, morigeror*, etc. No one seems to have taken the pains to work through the whole material carefully along these lines. It is a subject that ought to interest the teacher in the secondary school, and one might find it a profitable field of investigation. Mr. H. B. Dewing, late of the Berkeley (Cal.) High School, has undertaken a study of the subject in Plautus.

² A less radical policy is followed in the grammars of Hale and Buck and of Lane, but in the presentation of the subject in these textbooks there is a recognition of the failings of the old rule, as is shown by the very careful and judicious wording of the English translations (H.-B., p. 191, n. 3; L. 1182). In one or two of the other grammars a half-hearted attempt is made in a subsequent note to undo the mischief caused by the old rule—an expedient poor at best, and especially ineffective here because, as above noted, the student’s attention is fully centered on the list of English verbs he is required to memorize—this is the one thing he remembers; it may also be said truly that these added notes are not models of correct and clear statement. [In this connection it might be asked whether H.-B. 364. 1 is designed to imply that *invo, laedo*, etc., come under the heading of verbs of “quality, attitude, or relation;” as it stands, the statement seems likely to neutralize the good effect of the previously quoted reference.]

³ In a footnote there might be added a supplementary list of verbs thus construed, but which the student is likely to meet less frequently.

REMARK.—These are commonly rendered into English by the use of transitive verbs, thus obscuring the exact meaning of the Latin word; e. g., *opitulator* means, not “aid,” but “lend aid” (cf. *opem ferre*), and *servio* signifies “be in bondage” or “minister.” When thus translated, the reason for the use of the dative with these verbs is obvious.

This simple change at once sweeps away the serious difficulties which beset the old rule. For (1) *iuvo*, *laedo*, etc., no longer appear as “exceptions”—in fact, they do not enter the discussion at all, they as well as their common English translations being transitive; and (2) the statement really explains the use of the dative with the Latin verbs instead of obscuring the reason for the employment of that case.

This method of presentation would also have the additional advantage that it discourages careless and inexact translation. Young students generally seem to rest back on the complacent conviction that it is always possible to find an English word that exactly covers the meaning of a Latin word (or vice versa), and that, having memorized these pairs of words one is fully equipped for successful translation. Of course, the student does not consciously reason all this out, but—and here I speak from sad experience—this is the line along which his mind works. Hence it is that we are confronted with such monstrosities as *sum iens scribere* (“I am going to write”), *cives in corpore* (“the citizens in a body”), and *in hoc mucrone dixit* (“he spoke on this point”). Even the more apt pupil will write *umquam* for *semper* in translating “he was ever the bravest among the warriors,” the former word being his stock rendering for “ever;” and *dum* would often be written for *autem* in rendering into Latin “Catullus was a poet, while Horace was an artist.” This tendency to pair off Latin and English words without careful discrimination is naturally even more marked when there is outward similarity of form—as in the case of *servio* and “serve.” The rule as revised would militate against such carelessness, showing as it does that, for instance, *opitulator* and “to aid” do not cover exactly the same field of meaning, and that “to serve” is by no means an exact synonym for *servio*.¹

The method of setting forth the facts here proposed has therefore much to commend it. But, despite its advantages, there are perhaps some who would hesitate to cut loose from the old formula because of a lingering feeling that it may prove impossible to explain the use of the dative with *all* the verbs “of this class” (i. e., those which are commonly translated

¹ Experience with successive classes of freshmen engaged in the study of Latin composition leads me to believe that it is at just this point that the secondary teacher commits one of the most serious and prevalent sins of omission, i. e., in not training the student to look for the exact sense, and in not continually showing him that real translation cannot be accomplished by mechanically pairing off one English word against one Latin word and throwing one into the breach whenever its fellow appears.

“favor, help, please, trust, etc.”) in the same simple and satisfactory way found possible in the case of the two verbs treated above—that perhaps among the Latin verbs not yet considered there may be some, at any rate, whose dative can be understood only from the standpoint of comparative philology. At this stage of the investigation and with the scanty material at hand, I am not prepared to take up this question in all its aspects, but the following considerations readily suggest themselves:

1. The existence of an Indo-European peculiarity calling for comparative treatment is not demonstrated by the mere fact that in Latin, Greek, and other related languages there are found construed with the dative verbs which are commonly rendered into English by “favor, help, please, trust, etc.”—the apparent peculiarity may perhaps vanish when (as in the case of *opitulator* and *servio*) the exact force of the verbs is determined.¹

2. But granting, for the sake of argument, that we really have here to do with a peculiarity traceable to IE. inheritance, even a casual survey of the Latin and Greek verbs which the rule is designed to cover brings to light grave difficulties; for

a) Scarcely any of these verbs are cognates—i. e., derived from the same root-word (the most generally conceded case seems to be that of *fidō* and *πείθομαι*); whereas, if we were dealing with an inherited IE. peculiarity, such pairs of cognates ought to abound. On the contrary,

b) Cognates are not always construed in the same way in the two languages (e. g., *sequor* with accusative and *ἔπομαι* with the dative); and

c) Where the stem-meaning coincides there is often no etymological connection; e. g., *servio* (*servus*) and *δουλεύω* (*δοῦλος*), *auxilior* (*auxilium*) and *βοηθέω* (*βοήθεια*), *irascor* (*ira*) and *ὀργίζομαι* (*ὀργή*).

While these facts are hard to explain on the hypothesis of a peculiarity traceable to IE. inheritance, they are quite consistent with the assumption that the dative with these verbs stands upon its own footing in each of the languages concerned, and (since we can hardly suppose that these languages, developing independently, should have hit upon a common peculiarity so extensive and complicated) that the use of that case is simple and natural, and that it would so appear if we could determine exactly the point of view of the verb in each particular case.

3. Finally, the hypothesis of an IE. peculiarity calling for comparative treatment is virtually an assumption that a psychological change has taken place such that the selfsame *ideas* which to us are transitive appeared

¹ We should not, of course, deny the possibility that here and there a dative, once used normally, still persisted as a mere historical survival when conditions had so changed that another case would naturally be employed. Such sporadic survivals would hardly need to be regarded as exceptions to the principle above suggested—we simply have to go back a step further to find the reason for the use of the case.

to the Greek, Roman, or Anglo-Saxon mind as intransitive and suited to an indirect object. Such a state of affairs is scarcely comprehensible. It is infinitely simpler to suppose that we do not in every case comprehend exactly the point of view of the Greek, Latin, or Anglo-Saxon verb.

These three considerations do not, of course, comprise all that might be said on the subject, but they will perhaps serve to show that it is not impossible that the dative with verbs commonly translated "to favor, help, please, trust, etc," needs no elucidation from the standpoint of an assumed IE. peculiarity. That it certainly does not with some verbs has been shown in the earlier part of this paper, and the remote possibility that such elucidation may ultimately be required in a few cases should not outweigh the several marked advantages of the above proposed revision of the old rule.¹ Pedagogically considered it is far in advance of the old formula, and—*mea quidem sententia*—it rests on a far firmer foundation.

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¹ Should a few such cases be found, a mention of that fact in the Remark or in a footnote would meet all the needs of the situation.