

# ABLATIVE OF AGENT

Agent is the person or thing that performs the action of a verb. With an active verb, the agent is always expressed as the subject. For example, "boy" in "The boy leads the goat" is the subject as well as the agent of the verb "leads". With a passive verb, an agent may be omitted entirely. For example, in "The goat is led" there is no information about who is performing action. If a passive sentence includes an agent, it is expressed with a prepositional phrase using "by". For example, "by the boy" in "The goat is led by the boy."

Similarly, agent with a passive verb is expressed in Latin with a prepositional phrase using "ab" or "a": for example, *Haedus a puero ducitur*. Latin uses the preposition "ab" with the ablative case, just as it does to communicate Origin. This is because, from a Latin point of view, Agent is a kind of Origin. Although it could never be translated as "The goat is led from the boy", there is a sense in which the "leading" is originated with the boy.

Consider the following examples:

*Servus a domino videtur.* ("The servant is seen by the master.")

*Uva a feminâ accipitur.* ("The grape is taken by the woman.")

*Uvae a pueris comeduntur.* ("The grapes are eaten by the boys.")

It is important not to confuse this construction with the Ablative of Means. In English, the preposition "by" may introduce an agent with a passive verb but it may also introduce a means. For example, in "He was struck down by a Philistine", "by" introduces the agent, "a Philistine". However, in "He was struck down by an arrow.", "by" introduces a means, "an arrow", that is, how he was struck down. In Latin, these are always communicated differently: Agent is always communicated with the Ablative of Origin with the preposition "ab" or "a"; Means is communicated with the Ablative of Means without any preposition at all. The rule is that sentient beings, such as humans or gods, are expressed as origins, but anything else is expressed as a means.

Consider the following examples:

*Goliath a Davide lapide percutitur.* ("Goliath was struck with/ by a stone by David.")

*Servus a domino oculis videtur.* ("The servant is seen with/ by the eyes by his master.")