

CHAPTER 26

Comparison of Adjectives; Declension of Comparatives

DEGREES OF ADJECTIVES

Adjectives are words which attribute a quality to nouns, and in Latin adjectives must agree in number, gender and case they are modifying.

You have learned adjectives which decline in the first and second declensions, and those which decline in the third.

But up to this chapter the adjectives you've studied attribute qualities to nouns in what is called the positive degree only. That is, they simply attach the quality to the noun.

But adjectives can also attribute the quality in a way that compares the noun with other nouns by indicating that the noun has more of the quality than another noun, or that it has the most of the quality than at least two other nouns.

We call these two other degrees the comparative (more of the quality) and the superlative (most of the quality) degrees.

In English, we form the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives in two different ways.

We use the adverbs "more" and "most", and we use the suffixes "-er" and "-est" added to the base of the adjectives.

For example,

POSITIVE DEGREE	COMPARATIVE DEGREE	SUPERLATIVE DEGREE
blue skies	bluer skies	bluest skies
difficult book	more difficult book	most difficult book

For your concerns now, there is only one way to form the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives in Latin, and that is by adding suffixes to the base of the adjectives.

Since adjectives are listed in the dictionary under their base forms - the nominative singular of the positive degree - and don't have separate listings for inflected (or derived) forms, you're going to have to do some more work as you read to simplify adjectives in the comparative and superlative degrees down to their dictionary forms so that you can look them up.

THE COMPARATIVE DEGREE OF ADJECTIVES

To form the comparative degree of an adjective, you add the ending "*-ior*", "*-ius*" to its stem.

Let's have a look at this suffix.

Because the word is still an adjective, it's still going to have to decline.

The comparative suffix is a third declension ending and declines just like a normal noun of the third declension.

This is a little odd, since you might expect the comparative suffix to decline like a third declension adjective, and third declension adjectives are all i-stems.

(Look at Chapter 16 if you're not sure what I'm talking about.)

Let's look at the declension of this suffix.

The masculine and feminine nominatives are "*-ior*", and the neuter nominative is "*-ius*".

The stem of the ending is "*-ior-*".

Decline the comparative adjectival suffix.

The comparative ending "*-ior*, *-ius*" essentially tells you that it is a third declension adjective of two terminations.

Simply attach the proper third declension case endings to the stem "*-ior-*".

Don't forget the rules of the neuter. (Check your work in Wheelock.)

	MASCULINE AND FEMININE	NEUTER
N/V.	-ior	-ius
Gen.	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____
N/V.	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____

How did you do? Do you see the patterns at work?

The stem "-ior-" plus the case endings from the third declension non i-stem.

These are the inflected endings you then attach to the stem of the adjectives.

So to make any adjective comparative, regardless of its original declension - 1st and 2nd, or 3rd - you attach these endings to the stem of the adjective and then decline the adjective in the third declension.

This is important to remember.

As soon as an adjective is put into the comparative degree, it gets its case endings from the third declension, because that's how the comparative suffix declines.

Let's look at some examples of this.

ADJECTIVE	STEM	COMPARATIVE DEGREE
<i>beatus, -a, -um</i>	<i>beat-</i>	<i>beatior, -ius</i>
<i>fortis, -e</i>	<i>fort-</i>	<i>fortior, -ius</i>
<i>potens, potentis</i>	<i>potent-</i>	<i>potentior, -ius</i>

DRILL

Decline the following expressions :

wiser plan

more powerful city

N/V.	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____
N/V.	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____

THE SUPERLATIVE DEGREE OF ADJECTIVES

The superlative degree of adjectives is even easier to form.

It's simply the stem of the adjective plus the suffix "-issim-" plus the first and second declension adjectival endings "-us, -a, -um".

Hence all adjectives in the superlative degree decline like the simplest adjectives you know : the first and second declension types, just like "*magnus, -a, -um*". The only trick is to use the proper stem.

For example :

ADJECTIVE	STEM	SUPERLATIVE DEGREE
<i>beatus, -a, -um</i>	<i>beat-</i>	<i>beatissimus, -a, -um</i>
<i>fortis, -e</i>	<i>fort-</i>	<i>fortissimus, -a, -um</i>
<i>potens, potentis</i>	<i>potent-</i>	<i>potentissimus, -a, -um</i>

TRANSLATIONS OF THE COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE DEGREES

You may well wonder why we need to bother with how the degrees of the adjectives are translated. It's obvious that the comparative will be translated "more X" or "X-er" and that the superlative will be translated "most X" or "X-est". And, in fact these are common ways of translating them into English. But often, very often, the comparative and superlative degrees are used "absolutely"; that is, without anything being direct compared to the quality depicted in the adjective.

Latin can use the comparative degree to say "A is X-er than B", but it can also use the comparative degree to say "A is rather X".

Similarly, Latin can use the superlative degree to say "A is most X of all", or to say "A is very X".

Hence the adjective "*longior, -ius*" can mean "longer", if there's something being compared, or it can mean just "rather long", if there isn't anything being compared.

Similarly, "*longissimus, -a, -um*", can mean "longest", or it can mean "very long".

If there is nothing being compared to the noun with respect to the quality designed in the adjective, then use "rather" or "very" instead of "more" or "most".

THE USE OF THE ADVERB QUAM

The adverb "*quam*" is used like our word "than" in a comparison to link the two terms of the comparison. "They are more happy than we". Although we tend to slop over it in English, you must remember that in Latin the two things being compared must be in the same case. In the example I just gave, we might be tempted to say "They are happier than us", and we probably should say "us" if we're in a situation when erudition might be the cause of some scorn or suspicion. But technically, because "they" is the point of comparison, and because "they" is in the nominative case, we should use "we" and not "us". And so also, "They are happier than she [is]".

In Latin, the "*quam*" is like an equal sign : it requires the same case on each side of the comparison. Study these examples.

1. *Sunt beatiores quam ego.* (They are happier than I.)
2. *Ille est beator quam hic.* (That man is happier than this man.)
3. *Puto illos esse beatiores quam hos.* (I think that those men are happier than these men.)
4. *Nemo est stultior quam ei qui libros numquam legunt.* (No one is more foolish than those who never read books.)

"*Quam*" can also be used with an adjective in the superlative degree to mean "as X as possible".

In fact, sometimes the whole construction is written out like this: "*quam potest longissimus*": "as long as is possible".

THE POSSESSIVE PRONOUN

There is one other issue I'd like to take up even though it's not in Wheelock. It causes students some confusion.

Consider this sentence. "Our city is more illustrious than yours". The final word in the sentence, "yours" is standing in for "your city": "Our city is more illustrious than your city".

But English has a way of simplifying the full construction by using a "possessive pronoun". Check both words here : "pronoun", meaning a word which stands in for another, and "possessive", meaning a word that shows possession. The possessive pronouns in English for the different numbers and persons are : "mine, ours, yours, his, hers, its, theirs".

Latin has no equivalent of the possessive pronoun, which we find so useful. Instead, Latin uses the possessive adjective in the number and gender of the noun which has been omitted, and in the case required by the construction of the sentence. Like this.

1. "*Veni cum amicis meis; venit cum suis*". (I came with my friends; he came with his.)
2. "*Nostra civitas est clarior quam vestra*". (Our city is more illustrious than yours.)
3. "*Mea mater est sapientior quam tua*". (My mother is wiser than yours.)

DRILLS

Translate the following sentences into Latin.

1. Your city is rather shameful. _____
2. They said that this [woman] is happier than that [woman].

3. Their friends are wiser than ours. _____
4. The tyrant was very harsh. ("*acerbus, -a, -um*") _____
5. This road was as long as possible. _____

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

quidam, quaedam, quiddam or *quoddam*

Obviously this word is an inflected form of the relative pronoun "*qui, quae, quod*" with an indeclinable suffix "*-dam*" attached. It has a set of closely related meanings which make its translation a little slippery at first.

When used as an adjective, it means "a certain" or "some" : "*quidam auctor*" (some author); "*quaedam terrae*" (some lands), etc.

When it is used as a pronoun, it means "somebody", "something", "some people", "some things". "*Quidam putant eum stultum esse*" (Some people think he is foolish.)

"*Quiddam*" is the neuter form used when the word is being used as an adjective;

"*quoddam*" when it's being used as a pronoun.

"*Fecit quiddam consilium*" (He made some plan); "*Fecit quoddam*" (He made something).

You'll have to work some to keep this word distinct from "*quidem*" (indeed).

I remembered the difference this way. "*Quidem*" has "-e-", like "indeed". "*Quidam*" has an "-a-" as when you're saying "ah.". because you can't come up with the name for something.

quam You've see this before, meaning "how", as in "*Quam dulce est beatam vitam agere*" (How sweet it is to live a happy life). In this chapter, you learned that it is the adverb of comparison "than", and that it can also be used with a superlative degree of the adjective to mean "as X as possible", where X is the meaning of the adjective.

vito (1) Students always confuse this with "*vivo*" (to live). Try to remember this : when you see the verb "*vito*", it's inevitable (unavoidable) that you'll confuse it with something else.