

Chapter 26

RULE 1: There are three degrees of adjectives: positive ("big"), comparative ("bigger") and superlative ("biggest").

RULE 2: The regular comparative ending in Latin is *-ior, -ioris*. No matter the declension of the positive adjective, all comparatives belong to third declension (but are *noti*-stem!).

RULE 3: The regular superlative ending in Latin is *-issimus, -a, -um*. All superlatives belong to first/second declension.

RULE 4: After a comparative, "than" is expressed in Latin by *quam* (+ same case) or the ablative of comparison.

RULE 5: *Quam* + superlative = "as X as possible"

I. Grammar

Between the Charybdis of Indirect Statement and the Scylla of the Subjunctive come Chapters 26 and 27, offering a brief respite from rowing through heavy grammar. Covering only comparatives and superlatives, these lessons offer the opportunity to review the important constructions introduced in Chapters 23-25. It's important to batten these down before the storm of subjunctives hits in Chapters 28-30. Click [here](#) for a worksheet surveying participles, the ablative absolute, the passive periphrastic and indirect statement, with a few comparative constructions thrown in for good measure.

A. The Comparison of Latin Adjectives: Terminology, Formation and Translation

Begin by explaining the grammatical terminology relating to comparison. There are three **degrees** of adjectives: **positive** (big), **comparative** (bigger) and **superlative** (biggest). Underlying this is the assumption that comparatives imply the existence of *two* contrasting entities and superlatives that of at least *three*.

The formation of comparatives and superlatives in Latin is fairly easy:

- COMPARATIVE = Adjective Base + *-ior, -ioris* (third declension)
- SUPERLATIVE = Adjective Base + *-issimus, -a, -um* (first/second declension)

Note that these formulae are consistent across declensional lines. That is, no matter the declension of the original adjective, *all comparatives belong to third declension and all superlatives to first/second declension*.

1. Comparatives

While the declension of superlatives is blissfully simple, that of comparatives comes with a few hitches:

1. Comparatives belong to the third declension, a system which is harder in general for students to remember.
2. As third-declension adjectives, comparatives should be *i*-stem but they're not: the ablative singular is **-e** (not *-i*), the genitive plural is **-um** (not *-ium*), and the neuter nominative/accusative plural is **-a** (not *-ia*). See Wheelock, p. 123, note 3.
3. The neuter nominative/accusative singular ending is *-ius*, lacking the distinctive *-ior-* of the other forms which makes it easy to confuse with *-us*, the masculine nominative singular ending of first/second declension adjective in its positive degree (cf. *certus* vs. ***certius***).

Finally, the translation and usage of comparatives and superlatives are somewhat broader in Latin than English. As well as meaning "X-er" or "more X," comparatives can mean "somewhat X," "rather X" or "too X," i.e. "X in some way above the positive degree." In similar fashion, the superlative "most X" or "X-est" can mean "very X." The comparable

constructions exist in English today but seem somewhat contrived: "Why, India Wilkes, that's the *loveliest* dress. I just can't take my eyes off it."

B. "Than" Constructions

Latin has two ways of denoting "than." Wheelock introduces only one in this chapter, the more common one which employs *quam*. The other, the ablative of comparison, is sequestered in the Supplementary Syntax at the back of the book (pp. 374-379). Both should be introduced here.

1. *Quam* + Same Case

For the sake of simplicity, I call the first comparative construction (the one which uses *quam*) "***quam* + same case**." This serves as a quick and easy solution to the question "What case and why?," when the question is directed to the noun following *quam*. For example, if I were to give the students the sentence *eam amo plus quam oculos meos* and ask the question "What case is *oculos* and why?," the correct answer would be "Accusative, *quam* + same case (as the direct object)."

This "*quam* + same case" construction is a logical extension of grammatical apposition. That is, when the syntax of two words is parallel, they should logically be in the same case. If they are being equated, it is called apposition: "Here is my dog *Ralph*" (dog = *Ralph*). If they are being compared, then *quam* calls for the second noun to take the same case as the first: "I like my dog *Ralph* better *than my friend Brutus*" (my dog *Ralph* = my friend *Brutus* [only *Brutus* less so!]).

2. The Ablative of Comparison

The ablative of comparison is, in fact, a simpler construction than *quam* + same case. There is no conjunction and no variable case depending on the thing to which the comparison is being made. When associated with a comparative, the ablative simply connotes "than." Review Wheelock's examples on p. 377. Since Wheelock does not give examples of this in the lessons, drill students on this construction by having them change *quam* + same case constructions to the ablative of comparison whenever they encounter them in sentences.

C. *Quam* + Superlative

Wheelock sequesters an important construction in the vocabulary of this chapter (s.v. *quam*): *quam* + superlative = "as X as possible." Be sure to introduce it, when you are discussing the other constructions in this chapter.

D. The History of the Comparison of Latin Adjectives

1. Comparatives

Indo-European had no true comparatives. Two verbal suffixes, **-ios-* (with a zero-grade form **-is-*) and **-tero-*, were the progenitors of the comparatives seen in most Indo-European languages. These suffixes originally changed the meaning of the base adjective by intensifying it slightly. The suffix **-ios-* is comparable to Eng. *-ish* (e.g. ***biggish***) and had the meaning "rather/too X." The other **-tero-* was attached to the second of comparable pairs, e.g. ***alter, dexter, uter***(cf. English *-ther*: ***other, neither***); see *propter*, Chapter 5. Of these, **-ios-* became the productive ending for comparatives in Latin, whereas **-tero-* became the form used most often in Greek (although there are Greek "irregular" comparatives ending *-ion*, e.g. *beltion*).

Because the suffix *-ios-* ended with a consonant, it naturally followed the third (consonant) declension. In most cases, that produced an intervocalic *-s-* (e.g. ****maiosem***), which in Latin later "rhotacized" to ***maiosem***. Therefore, it is not the neuter singular ending *-ius* which is irregular—it did not rhotacize because Indo-European had no ending in the neuter nominative/accusative singular and thus the *-s* was not between vowels—all the other forms of the comparative, however, created an intervocalic *-s-* which changed the suffix from *-ios-* to *-ior-* through rhotacism.

2. Superlatives

Indo-European had no true superlatives either. Just as with the comparative, there were originally two suffixes: **-to-* and **-mo-*. The first (**-to-*) had a completive function signaling the final member of a given group. This same suffix can be seen in ordinal numbers, such as Latin *tertius* or English *sixth*. To this, some Indo-European languages prefixed *-is-*, the zero grade of the comparative suffix, creating a double suffix **-is/to-* which in English evolved into *-est* and in Greek *-istos* (cf. *aristos*). Latin, however, favored the other suffix **-mo-* which carried a connotation of extremeness, cf. *summus* (< **sup(er)-mo-s*), *demum*, *primus*. The origin of *-issimus* has proven more difficult to recover. It is possibly a combination of the comparative suffix **-is-* and **-semo-*, an extended form of **-mo-*. But in any case, the superlative originally meant something like "the last more (thing)" or "the furthest more (thing)."

3. "Than" Constructions

Consider these two sentences: (1) *Caesar tam fortis erat quam Cicero* ("Caesar was as brave as Cicero"), and (2) *Caesar non fortior erat quam Cicero* ("As [compared to] Cicero, Caesar was not the braver man"). It has been suggested that *quam* took on the meaning "than" (after comparatives) in a circumstance much like the second of the sentences cited above, where a negative statement with a comparative adjective replaces the *tam* half of a *tam . . . quam* construction.

The ablative of comparison is relatively rare in older Latin which prefers *quam*. The ablative is used mainly with negative, set and quantitative expressions. Even still among classical authors, ablatives of comparison are most often associated with negative statements. Taking a cue from the genitive of comparison which occurs ubiquitously in Greek, later Roman poets applied the ablative in its sense of "than" somewhat more widely than it had been before, especially where exalted language is called for (e.g. *O fons Bandusiae, splendidior vitro* [Horace, *Odes* 3.13]).

III. Vocabulary

- **auctor**: This noun is based on the verb *augeo* "increase"; hence, it means literally "an increasor, a promoter."
- **lux**: *Lux* is cognate with Greek *leukos* ("white") by a regular change of inherited Indo-European *eu/ou* to Latin *û*, cf. Greek *euô* and Latin *ûro* (< **euso*), Indo-European **deuko* and Latin *duco*.
- **quidam**: = the interrogative base *qui-* (pronoun or adjective) + the suffix *-dam*. Thus, it appears to decline down the middle of the word.
- **clarus**: This adjective demonstrates a principle called synaesthesia, the extension of a word's meaning from one sense to another, cf. English *sweet-sounding* where "sweet" originally referred to taste and was later extended to hearing. *Clarus* originally referred to hearing—it comes from the same base as *clamo* and *calare* (cf. Greek *kaleo*)—but, when extended later to the realm of vision, came to mean "bright, clear." In other words, *clarus* originally had a connotation something like "loud-looking."
- **pro**: This preposition takes the **ablative** case. *Pro* is cognate by Grimm's Law with English "*for(e)*"—Grimm's Law calls for an inherited *p* to turn into *f* in English—logically, then, *pro* and *for* share certain meanings ("on behalf of, in return for, instead of").
- **vito**: To Wheelock's warning against confusing forms of *vito* and *vivo*, I would add *vita*.

IV. Sentences

Focus on indirect statement, participles, passive periphrastics and ablative absolutes as much as the comparatives and superlatives introduced in this chapter. Be sure students can recognize these constructions and understand the syntax of their components.

V. Quiz 2

Quiz 2

I. Supply the proper positive, comparative and superlative forms of adjectives below. Give ONLY masculine nominative singular forms. (10 pts.)

#	POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
1.		turpior	
2.	brevis		
3.			dulcissimus
4.	certus		
5.			beatissimus

II. Translate the following phrases or sentences into English. Be sure that your translation properly reflects the tense and voice of the verb forms. (10 pts.)

1. acerbior rege
2. remedium nobis accipiendum est
3. dixit veritatem non vitari posse
4. imperio a ducibus petito
5. iucundius cupiditate

III. Decline the COMPARATIVE of the adjective *clarus*, -a, -um in all cases, numbers, and genders. (10 pts.)

CASE	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	NEUT	MASC/FEM	NEUT	
NOM				
GEN				
DAT				
ACC				
ABL				

IV. Fill in the blanks with the correct vocabulary forms of the Latin words below. Give the NOMINATIVE, GENITIVE, and GENDER of nouns, and the PRINCIPAL PARTS (PRESENT INDICATIVE, PRESENT INFINITIVE, PERFECT INDICATIVE, PERFECT PARTICIPLE) of verbs. For adjectives give the NOMINATIVE forms. (20 pts.)

1. a certain man/woman/thing (=someone, something)
2. *the* enemy
3. not to know
4. light
5. on behalf of
6. here
7. say that . . . not