

COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

GM 14

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Introduction

- A great part of adjectives has an ability to create two forms which express higher degree of quality: **comparative** and **superlative**.

| | positive | comparative | superlative |
|------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------|
| English | good | better | the best |
| German | gut | besser | der beste |
| Italian | buono | migliore | ottimo |
| French | bon | mellieur | le mellieur |
| Portuguese | bom | melhor | ó(p)timo/o melhor |
| Greek | καλός | καλύτερα | ο καλύτερος (από όλους) |
| Latin | bonus | melior | optimus |

- Comparative is the form of an adjective used to compare two things.
- the muscle is **longer** (than the other one):
musculus longior.
- a **shorter** sinew (shorter than another sinew):
ligamentum brevius.

- The superlative has two meanings in Latin:
 1. An ordinary superlative is used to express which thing has the quality above or below the others (there must be at least three things to use the superlative).
 - **the longest** muscle (of all the muscles in a body): *musculus longissimus*.
 - **the shortest** sinew (of all the sinews ...): *ligamentum brevissimum*.

2. So called “elative” meaning:

- it has exactly the same form as an ordinary superlative.
- but it is not used for comparison. Instead it expresses a **very high degree of quality**:
 - a very different symptom: *symptoma difficilimum*.
 - a very long muscle: *musculus longissimus*.
 - a very short sinew: *ligamentum brevissimum*.

- If we use a superlative in medical terminology the meaning is usually the relative one.
- There are adjectives that create neither comparatives nor superlatives. Example: adjective *biceps* means literally “with two heads”, there is no sensible comparative or superlative.
- In certain cases the superlative and comparative meanings are questionable (white, more white, the most white).

- In Latin the basic form of adjective from which we create comparatives and superlatives is called “positive”.
- There are adjectives that lack a positive form and have only comparatives and superlatives.

Regular comparative in Latin

- So far we have discussed two groups of adjectives:
 - type *longus, a, um* (uses endings from the 1st and 2nd declension) and
 - *brevis, e* (endings from the 3rd declension).
- **Both** groups of adjectives create comparative in the same way.
- Comparative forms of adjectives have endings according the 3rd declension paradigm *dolor* and *caput*. (This is true even if the adjective in basic form is inflexed according the 1st and 2nd declension.).

- To create a comparative we must:
 1. identify the stem (i.e. in *longus, a, um* the stem is *long-*)
 2. add *-ior-*
 3. append the ending (if there is any).
- There is exception from this procedure in Nom. a Acc. Sg. for neutrals where instead of *-ior-* we use ending *-ius*.

Regular comparatives

| | M/F | N | M/F | N |
|------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Nom. | <i>long -ior</i> | <i>long -ius</i> | <i>long -ior- es</i> | <i>long -ior- a</i> |
| Gen. | <i>long -ior- is</i> | | <i>long -ior- um</i> | |
| Acc. | <i>long -ior- em</i> | <i>long -ius</i> | <i>long -ior- es</i> | <i>long -ior- a</i> |
| Abl. | <i>long -ior- e</i> | | <i>long -ior- ibus</i> | |

Note Nom. and Acc. for neutrals in Sg. where the ordinary *-ior-* is missing. Also note that the suffix follows exactly the *dolor/caput* paradigm.

Regular superlative in Latin

- Both groups of adjectives regardless their original declension use endings from the 1st and 2nd declension to create superlative form.
- The superlative is created by inserting *-issim-* in front of the suffix.
- In comparison with previous paradigm there is no exception in neutral form.

Regular superlative in Latin singular

| | M | F | N |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Nom. | long -issim- us | long -issim- a | long -issim- um |
| Gen. | long -issim- i | long -issim- ae | long -issim- i |
| Acc. | long -issim- um | long -issim- am | long -issim- um |
| Abl. | long -issim- o | long -issim- a | long -issim- o |

Regular superlative in Latin plural

| | M | F | N |
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Nom. | long -issim- i | long -issim- ae | long -issim- a |
| Gen. | long -issim- orum | long -issim- arum | long -issim- orum |
| Acc. | long -issim- os | long -issim- as | long -issim- a |
| Abl. | long -issim- is | long -issim- is | long -issim- is |

Defective adjectives

- They are used in anatomy mainly to indicate space relations (forward, backward, upper, lower, external, internal, ...).
- Defective adjectives have not the positive form. They have only comparative and superlative forms.
- However meaning of comparative form is usually equal to English positive.
- They are grammatically regular (i.e. use normal comparative set of endings).

- Following defective adjectives are required:
 - *superior, ius* (upper)
 - *inferior, ius* (lower)
 - *anterior, ius* (frontal)
 - *posterior, ius* (rear, caudal)
 - *exterior, ius* (outside)
 - *interior, ius* (inside)
- Further details (and superlative forms) can be found on the page 183 - 184.

Irregular superlatives

- Two groups of adjectives have irregular superlatives:
 - Every adjective that terminates in nominative case of its basic form (positive) for masculines with ending -r creates superlative with *-rrimus* instead of -issimus.
 - Adjectives *similis*, *dissimilis*, *facilis*, *difficilis* (identical, different, simple, difficult) create superlatives using *-llimus*.

Regular
superlative
(*brevis, e*)

Irregular
superlative
(*acer*, *is, e*)

Irregular
superlative
(*difficilis, e*)

brevissimus
brevissimi
brevissimum
brevissimo

acerrimus
acerrimi
acerrimum
acerrimo

difficillimus
difficillimi
difficillimum
difficillimo

brevissimi
brevissimorum
brevissimos
brevissimis

acerrimi
acerrimorum
acerrimos
acerrimis

difficillimi
difficillimorum
difficillimos
difficillimis

Entirely irregular comparatives

| | positive | comparative | superlative |
|-------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| good | bonus, a, um | melior, ius | optimus, a, um |
| bad | malus, a, um | peior, ius | pessimus, a, um |
| big | magnus, a, um | maior, ius | maximus, a, um |
| small | parvus, a, um | minor, minus | minimus, a, um |

Four adjectives create comparative and superlative forms using different stems. Endings have ordinary grammar. So *bonus, a, um* is on the basis of *longus, a, um*; its comparative *melior, ius* uses *dolor/caput* paradigm, and finally superlative *optimus, a, um* follows again *longus, a, um* paradigm.

Textbook

- For related grammar see p. 180 - 184.