

CHAPTER

8

Irregular Comparatives and Superlatives; *Quam* with the Superlative of Adjectives and Adverbs; Deponent Verbs



Artist Paul Joseph Jamin (1853–1903) imagines Brennus, chief of the Gallic Senones gloating over the spoils of victory over the Romans.

MEMORĀBILE DICTŪ

Nōn enim tam praeclārum est scīre Latīnē quam turpe nescīre.

“It is not as praiseworthy to know Latin as it is shameful not to know it.” (Cicero, *Brutus*, 37.140)

In this dialogue about oratory, Cicero makes this famous remark, when characterizing the unaffected speech of an orator a generation older than himself, named Marcus Antonius. Cicero observes that although this man gave the impression of speaking in a casual manner, his Latin was pure and correct.

READING

The humanists who championed the Renaissance movement in their support of Latin, however, were not merely motivated by admiration for classical antiquity but also by a more practical concern. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE a new more technical Latin developed in European universities. There was a serious danger that academic and scientific Latin might develop into a group of hybrid, mutually unintelligible jargons. Hence the humanists made it their mission to restore the international language of the European elite to its classical Roman norms. These efforts at humanistic reform of Latin were astoundingly successful. Latin remained the main language of the well educated and of the scientific community until the mid-eighteenth century. And from the mid-fifteenth century, the norm for nearly all who have written in Latin has been the revived classical Latin championed by the humanists. Even today, the basic Latin grammar taught in modern textbooks is basically that employed by Cicero.

One of the main leaders in the humanistic reform of Latin was Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), a true “Renaissance man” who made many contributions to different branches of learning. Valla’s great work on the Latin language was entitled *Ēlegantiārum linguae Latīnae librī sex* (*Six Books Concerning Proper Uses of the Latin Language*). In the study of rhetoric, the Latin word *ēlegantia* means “carefully chosen and accurate use of words and phrases.” Valla’s work on this topic was a vast treasure trove of idiomatic phrases and grammatical constructions found in classical Roman authors, all of which Valla’s contemporaries could employ when writing and speaking Latin.

The reading below is adapted from the preface to Book I of Valla’s *Ēlegantiae*. From the perspective of the European community of the educated elite, Valla demands that Europe’s international language be restored to its pure and correct form, a situation which he represents allegorically as Rome, and thereby Latin, captured by the Gauls, who stand for corrupting, non-Latin influences on the language. What is more, Valla, who was not known for his modesty, represents himself as the great general who will expel the Gauls and restore the city. Valla’s allegory is based on an incident in earlier, ancient Roman history, memorably narrated by Livy: in 390 BCE, the invading Gauls actually captured Rome, and occupied it for a while, until the Romans regained their city.





This fresco celebrates the Donation of Constantine who is shown presenting his crown to the enthroned Pope Sylvester I. Valla carefully studied the document associated with this event which was designed to legitimize the pope's political power. Valla exposed it as a forgery written in the eighth century CE.

ĒLEGANTIĀRUM LINGVAE LATĪNAE PRAEFĀTIŌ PRĪMA

1 Cum saepe dē nostrōrum māiōrum et aliārum gentium rēbus gestīs
cōgitō, videntur mihi nostrī māiōrēs nōn solum imperiī sed etiam
linguae prōpāgātiōne aliōs omnēs superāvise. Cerēs laudābātur, quod
frūmentum hominibus dederat; Minerva laudābātur, quod oleās
5 hominibus dederat; antīquī hominēs propter beneficia hominibus data
colēbantur tamquam deī. Eratne minus ūtile linguam Latīnam gentibus
dedisse, optimam frūgem et vērē dīvīnam, nec corporis sed animī
cibum? Haec enim lingua gentēs illās omnibus artibus, quae liberālēs
vocantur, instituit. Haec optimās lēgēs docuit. Haec viam ad omnem
10 sapientiam ostendit. Et māiōrēs nostrī aliōs omnēs hortābantur ut et
Rōmae et in prōvinciīs Latīnē loquerentur.

At imperium Rōmānum, tamquam onus ingrātum, gentēs
nātiōnēsque prīdem abiēcērunt. Linguam Latīnam omnī aurō
meliōrem putāvērunt, et sicut rem dīvīnam ē caelō missam apud sē
15 servāvērunt! Āmīsimus, Rōmānī, āmīsimus imperium et dominātum:
tamen per hunc splendidiōrem dominātum in māgnā adhūc parte orbis
terrārum rēgnāmus. Nostra est Ītalia, nostra Gallia, nostra Hispānia,
Germānia, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Illyricum multaeque aliae nātiōnēs! Ibi
enim Rōmānum imperium est, ubicumque Rōmāna lingua dominātur!

20 Quis autem litterārum bonīque pūblicī studiōsus ā lacrimīs
temperābit, cum vīderit linguam Latīnam eō in statū esse quō ōlim
Rōma capta ā Gallīs? Quoūsque, Quiritēs—litterārum vocō et linguae
Latīnae cultōrēs, quī vērī Quiritēs sunt—quoūsque, inquam, urbem
nostram, parentem litterārum ā Gallīs captam esse patiēminī, id est
25 linguam Latīnam ā barbarīs esse oppressam? Parābō exercitum, quem
in hostēs dūcam! Animōs vestrōs firmābō. Ībō in aciem! Ībō prīmus!



READING VOCABULARY

abiciō, ere, abiēcī, abiectum – to throw away

aciēs, aciēī, f. – line of battle, sharp edge

*adhūc (adv.) – still, up to this time

*antīquus, a, um – ancient

*ars, artis, f. – science, art, skill

barbarus, ī, m. – barbarian †

beneficium, ī, n. – benefit, favor, service

bonum pūblicum, n. – the public good

Cerēs, Cereris, f. – Ceres †

cultor, cultōris, m. – fosterer, supporter, cultivator

Dalmatia, ae, f. – Dalmatia †

dominātus, dominātūs, m. – rule, sovereignty

*dominātur – rules

ēlegantia, ae, f. – precision in language, elegance

frūx, frūgis, f. – crop, produce of the earth

frūmentum, ī, n. – grain

Gallia, ae, f. – a region of modern France

Gallī, ōrum, m. pl. – Gauls †

Germānia, ae, f. – Germany †

Hispānia, ae, f. – Spain

*hortābantur ut loquerentur – they were exhorting to speak

ibō – I shall go

id est – namely, that is to say †

Illyricum, ī, n. – Illyricum †

ingrātus, a, um – unwelcome, unpleasant

īnstituō, ere, īnstituī, īnstitutum + accusative + ablative – to train or educate someone in a skill

Ītalia, ae, f. – Italy

*Latīnus, a, um – Latin, pertaining to Latin

*Latīnē (adv.) – in Latin

liberālis, liberāle – befitting a free man, generous; artēs liberālēs – the liberal arts †

*lingua, ae, f. – language, tongue (as physical part of the mouth)

*māior, māius – bigger, greater;

māiōrēs, um, m. pl. – ancestors †

nostrī – Valla means the ancient Romans

*melior, melius – better

Minerva, ae, f. – Minerva †

*minus (adv.) – less

nātiō, nātiōnis, f. – a race of people, tribe

olea, ae, f. – olive

ōlim (adv.) – once upon a time

onus, oneris, n. – burden

*optimus, a, um – best

orbis, is, m. – circle, disc, globe

orbis terrārum – the world

Pannonia, ae, f. – Pannonia †

*patiēminī – you will tolerate

praefātiō, praefātiōnis, f. – preface

prīdem (adv.) – long ago

prōpāgātiō, prōpāgātiōnis, f. – spreading, propagation

prōvincia, ae, f. – province (territorial), any duty or sphere of activity (not territorial)

Quirītēs, Quirītium, m. pl. – Roman citizens †

quod (conj.) – because

quoūsq̄ue (adv.) – how far, to what extent

rēgnō, āre, āvī, ātum – to reign, rule

rēs (rērum) gestae, ārum, f. pl. – things done, history †

sapientia, ae, f. – wisdom

sē – here (as very often) the reflexive pronoun of the plural meaning “themselves”

splendidus, a, um – illustrious, distinguished, shining

status, statūs, m. – condition, state, attitude

superō, āre, āvī, ātum – to surpass, conquer

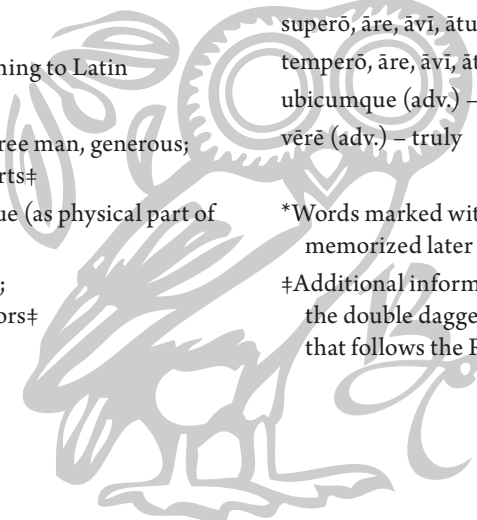
temperō, āre, āvī, ātum āb + ablative – to refrain from

ubicumque (adv.) – wherever

verē (adv.) – truly

*Words marked with an asterisk will need to be memorized later in the chapter.

†Additional information about the words marked with the double dagger will be in the **Take Note** section that follows the Reading Vocabulary.





TAKE NOTE

artēs liberālēs The liberal arts typically consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (*trivium*); and geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy (*quadrivium*).

barbarus, ī, m. Originally this word primarily meant “non-Greek” or “non-Roman;” by Valla’s time it meant not only “foreign,” but “uneducated.”

Cerēs, Cereris f. Ceres was the goddess of grain and agriculture; in Greek she was called Demeter.

Dalmatia The region called Dalmatia was a part of the Roman Empire next to Illyricum on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea. It corresponds in part to the area today called Croatia.

Gallī, ōrum, m. pl. The Gauls were the inhabitants of France: in antiquity they were Celtic, until they mingled with the Romans after the conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar in the first century BCE.

Germānia The region of Europe called Germany approximately corresponds to modern Germany.

id est This is a common phrase used to make a previous assertion more specific and is sometimes abbreviated i.e.

Illyricum Illyricum is a region situated on the west coast of what is today the Balkan peninsula.

māiorēs, um, m. pl. The idea that one’s elders were morally superior and worthy of reverence, especially the ancestors of great families, was very prevalent in Roman society. Hence the use of the word *māiōrēs* which essentially means “the greater ones” to be equivalent to “ancestors” is a logical development.

Minerva Minerva is the goddess of wisdom and war; in Greek she is called Athena. She gave the Athenians the gift of the olive tree.

Pannonia This is a region which approximately corresponds to modern Hungary.

Quirītēs, Quiritium, m. pl. Roman citizens called themselves *Quirītēs*. According to legend, the primitive Romans took this name when they combined with the Sabines; originally the *Quirītēs* were inhabitants of a Sabine town.

rēs (rērum) gestae, ārum, f. pl. things done, history: the phrase *Rēs gestae* became a common title for historical or annalistic works in the Roman Empire itself from the time of Augustus onward and especially during the Middle Ages.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Valla consider the Latin language to be a “divine” gift?
2. What is Valla’s attitude to the political entity that was the ancient Roman Empire?
3. In what sense does Valla consider that the Roman Empire still exists in his own time?
4. To what historical situation does Valla compare the condition of the Latin language in his day, and why?
5. How did Valla establish philology as an academic discipline?

LANGUAGE FACT I

IRREGULAR COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

In the chapter reading passage you noticed three comparative words that are not derived from the positive form of adjectives and adverbs according to the typical pattern you just learned in Chapter 6:

māiōr, māiōris, “greater:” the comparative of *māgnus*;

minus, “less:” the comparative adverb (the same form is the neuter singular comparative adjective) of *parvus*;

melior, meliōris, “better:” the comparative of *bonus*.

The same passage also contains a superlative that is clearly not derived from the base of the positive adjective:

optimus, a, um, “best:” the superlative of *bonus*.

A whole group of irregular comparatives and superlatives must be learned, since they are all commonly found in works written in Latin.

Common Irregular Comparatives and Superlatives

Positive degree	Comparative degree	Superlative degree
bonus, a, um – good	melior, melius – better	optimus, a, um – best
malus, a, um – bad	pēior, pēius – worse	pessimus, a, um – worst
māgnus, a, um – great	māiōr, māius – greater	maximus, a, um – greatest
parvus, a, um – small	minor, minus – smaller	minimus, a, um – smallest
multus, a, um – much	plūs (neuter noun) – more	plūrimus, a, um – most
multī, ae, a – many	plūrēs, plūra – more	plūrimī, ae, a – most



BY THE WAY

The comparative adverb of *māgnus* is *magis*, which means “more greatly” or “rather.”

The comparative and superlative forms above, though not regularly derived from the base of the positive adjective, are declined according to the patterns for comparatives and superlatives you have already learned.

Declension of *pēior*, *pēius*

	Singular		Plural	
	Masculine and Feminine	Neuter	Masculine and Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	<i>pēior</i>	<i>pēius</i>	<i>pēiōrēs</i>	<i>pēiōra</i>
Genitive	<i>pēiōris</i>	<i>pēiōris</i>	<i>pēiōrum</i>	<i>pēiōrum</i>
Dative	<i>pēiōrī</i>	<i>pēiōrī</i>	<i>pēiōribus</i>	<i>pēiōribus</i>
Accusative	<i>pēiōrem</i>	<i>pēius</i>	<i>pēiōrēs</i>	<i>pēiōra</i>
Ablative	<i>pēiōre</i>	<i>pēiōre</i>	<i>pēiōribus</i>	<i>pēiōribus</i>
Vocative	<i>pēior</i>	<i>pēius</i>	<i>pēiōrēs</i>	<i>pēiōra</i>

Declension of *plūs*, *plūris*

	Singular	Plural	
	Neuter	Masculine and Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	<i>plūs</i>	<i>plūrēs</i>	<i>plūra</i>
Genitive	<i>plūris</i>	<i>plūrium</i>	<i>plūrium</i>
Dative	—	<i>plūribus</i>	<i>plūribus</i>
Accusative	<i>plūs</i>	<i>plūrēs</i>	<i>plūra</i>
Ablative	(<i>plūre</i>)	<i>plūribus</i>	<i>plūribus</i>
Vocative	—	<i>plūrēs</i>	<i>plūra</i>



BY THE WAY

Plūs has only a neuter singular. Both the dative and vocative singular do not occur, and the ablative singular rarely occurs. Also unlike other comparatives, the genitive plural of *plūrēs* ends in *-ium*.

Note that *plūs*, *plūris* is a neuter noun in the singular, which is typically modified by a genitive, e.g., *plūs aquae* “more (of) water.” This is known as a genitive of the whole or partitive genitive. In the plural, however, *plūrēs* is an adjective, e.g., *plūrēs mīlitēs* “more soldiers.”



Minerva laudābātur, quod oleās hominibus dederat.