The Category of Comparison in Latin

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*By*

Lucie Pultrová

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# Preface

This book, as its title indicates, focuses on one of the basic—yet in Latin linguistics still rather neglected—grammatical categories: comparison of adjectives (and adverbs). The basic question it poses is which Latin adjectives and adverbs allow for comparative and superlative forms, and which ones do not—a question that may seem trivial to those working with modern languages but is not at all trivial to answer in the case of a dead language such as Latin that has no native speakers.

The book came into being as part of the project "Comparison of adjectives in Latin" (GAČR 17–11247S) supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic and undertaken between 2017 and 2019. The impetus for this project, however, was brought much earlier to me by one of my students, Petr Hrach, who himself came up with the idea of exploring the topic of gradability of Latin adjectives in his bachelor's thesis. He was inspired to do so upon reading a brief remark in a then newly edited corpus-based grammar of Czech, several times quoted in this book, reporting that in the *Czech National Corpus* only 6 % of Czech adjectives have attested graded forms. Petr's bachelor's thesis was successfully completed and defended, but—logically, in view of the narrow scope of such work—it limited itself to just a basic introduction to the topic, the Latin examples being rather unsystematically used to fill in the frame elaborated previously by general linguistics. It soon became apparent that if we wanted to systematically answer the question of which Latin adjectives are gradable and which are not, it would be necessary to process an immense amount of material, a task considerably exceeding the scope of any student work. Petr, who did not wish to pursue the topic further, gave me permission to submit a grant project proposal of my own to build on his work.

Several studies were published within this project, material from which has been included in this monograph:

Pultrová, L. (2020). "Comparison and Negation in Latin", *Glotta* 96 (2020): 178–212.

Pultrová, L. (2019a). "Comparison of Compound Adjectives in Latin", *Eiréné* 55 (2019): 67–116.

Pultrová, L. (2019b). "Correlation between the gradability of Latin adjectives and the ability to form qualitative abstract nouns", in Žabokrtský, Ševčíková, Litta & Passarotti 2019: 25–34.

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Pultrová, L. (2019c). "Kategorie stupňování u pozdnělatinských gramatiků". *Auriga–ZJKF* 61/2 (2019): 43–64.
Pultrová, L. (2018). "Periphrastic comparison in Latin", *Journal of Latin linguistics* 17/1 (2018): 93–110.
Pultrová, L. (2016). "The Latin bonus–melior–optimus", *AUC Philologica–Graecolatina Pragensia* 26 (2016): 59–68.

While the relevant chapters of this book correspond to a great extent to these particular studies, the texts have been reorganized so as to create a consistent whole, and further work on the topic showed that several adjustments were needed. Where the texts differ from each other in substance, I consider the version published in this monograph to be the more authoritative. A substantial part of this monograph, the main and longest chapter on derivatives in particular (§ 3.4), has not been previously published in any form.

A brief summary of what the reader may find in the book runs as follows: **Chapter 1** (pp. 1–38) explains the aim of the work behind this book; this part contains all the necessary preliminaries—theoretical background to the study, methodology, and how the corpus of Latin texts on which the research is based was created. A longer chapter is devoted to how the Late Latin grammarians viewed the category of comparison. **Chapter 2** (pp. 39–72) covers the Latin comparative and superlative forms, and includes a description of the origin of the comparative and superlative suffixes and of the various irregular forms. A major chapter in this part deals with the issue of the periphrastic comparison, which from the time of the Late Latin grammarians up to the present day has been treated in grammar books incorrectly. **Chapter 3** (pp. 73–301) represents the main part of the book. Here the Latin material is analysed with the aim of answering the question of which Latin adjectives are gradable and which are not, and with the aim of providing the user of Latin with some objective criteria (i.e. not depending on his or her own understanding of the semantics of the adjectives) for determining this answer. The short, concluding **Chapter 4** summarizes the approach taken in this book and attempts to extract some general principles from the lengthy analysis of the various classes of Latin adjectives given in Chapter 3.

My intention in writing this book was that besides its primary audience of classical philologists it could also be useful to general linguists, who at the very least will be able to draw on its Latin material. This is the reason why all the Latin material is consistently translated into English (the translations of individual words have been taken from the basic source of Latin material, the *Oxford Latin*

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*Dictionary*) and why the book here and there also contains information that could seem trivial to classical philologists (e.g. the dating of some texts). General linguists, on the other hand, may find trivial the theoretical descriptions given in Chapter 1. To enable the book to be used by both groups of potential readers I try to employ intuitively understandable terminology. My theoretical approach is rooted in the tradition of Czech studies: firstly, I find the tradition, especially in the field of word formation, extraordinary; and secondly, I believe that it could be refreshing to those who are grounded in a different intellectual tradition.

The majority of those who take this book in hand will surely not read it from A to Z but will rather search for some particular adjective or adjective class. For this purpose, an extensive index of adjectives can be found at the end of the book. Here, however, one thing should be noted: The index only includes adjectives that are expressedly quoted in the text, which is to say not all the adjectives that were subject to analysis (these numbered around 10,000; for how the corpus for analysis was created see § 1.5). Adjectives belonging to the most productive classes with hundreds or even thousands of representatives, or to the semantically simplest classes, do not all appear individually in the text, and are thus not in the index. A reader searching for and not finding a particular adjective in the index should therefore make use of the list of suffixes (or second elements of compounds)—these also appear in the index; a list of adjectival suffixes is also given at the beginning of § 3.4 (pp. 147–150).

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, not only of the book itself but also of the studies mentioned above, for all their comments and suggestions. My sincere thanks also go to all those who helped to translate the text into English: Kamila Panešová, Václav Koutný, Nicholas Ryan Daniels, and especially Andrew Goodall, who has done much more for the text than just adjusting language. I am very thankful to my colleagues from the Faculty of Arts (Charles University Prague), especially from the Institute of Greek and Latin Studies, for creating such a friendly and inspirative atmosphere where it is a joy to work. And finally, of course, my heartfelt thanks go to my dear family for their love and support.

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# Abbreviations

### Dictionaries and databases

| | |
|---|---|
| BTL | Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina |
| CIL | Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum |
| IEW | Pokorny (1959) |
| LIV | Rix (2001) |
| OLD | Oxford Latin Dictionary |
| ThLL | Thesaurus linguae Latinae |
| Beekes | Beekes (2016) |
| Chantraine | Chantraine (1968) |
| de Vaan | de Vaan (2008) |
| Ernout–Meillet | Ernout & Meillet (1932) |
| Walde–Hofmann | Walde & Hofmann (1938–1956) |

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