

*Altissimae quaeque flumina, minimo sono labuntur.*¹



Comparison of Adjectives

Latin Without Tears page 87 introduces the comparison of adjectives using *carus carior, carissimus* “dear,” “dearer,” “dearest” and a couple of other similar words. Brush up your English grammar if you need to at this point to make sure you understand this by reading the section in [blue](#) below.

My old grammar book puts it like this:

Consider these sentences:

1. Mr Coppercoin is a rich man.
2. Mr Silverbit is a richer man.
3. Mr Goldpiece is the richest man.

Note the use of *rich, richer, richest*. In the sentence 1 *rich* simply expresses the quality of the adjective. In sentence 2 *richer* is used to compare Mr Silverbit with Mr Coppercoin. He is the richer of the two men. In sentence 3 note *richest*. When comparing the wealth of the three rich men Mr Goldpiece is the *richest*. These three forms, *rich, richer, richest*, represent three degrees of comparison. *Rich* is the ordinary form of the adjective. It is called the *Positive Degree*. *Richer* is used when one person or thing is being compared with another. It is called the *Comparative Degree*. *Richest* is used when one person or thing is above or superior to all others in the particular quality under consideration. It is called the *Superlative Degree*.

In short words like *rich*, the comparative degree is formed by adding *-er*, and the superlative by adding *-est*, to the positive degree: eg. *Rich, richer, richest...* some of the commonest adjectives, however, have irregular comparisons: eg. *Good, better, best; bad, worse, worst; little. Less/lesser, least; much/mny, more, most; near, nearer, nearest/next.*²

Remember that *carus* has a masculine, feminine and neuter form with the masculine following the

¹ The deepest rivers flow with the minimum sound. Quintus Rufus Curtius

² Humphries, Gordon, *Teach Yourself English Grammar* (London, 1945) p.56.

same pattern as second declension words like *Dominus*, the feminine following the pattern of first declension words like *femina* and the neuter following the pattern of second declension neuter words like *bellum*. The same is true of *carissimus* the superlative. We have *carissimus* etc. masculine, *carissima* etc. feminine and *carissimum* etc. neuter. However, the comparative, *carior*, follows a different pattern related to third declension words which we have not yet covered. So, for the present, although you can now translate quite a few adjectives in the positive and superlative forms you are more limited in what you can do with the comparative. Latin adjectives in the superlative are always easy to spot: just look out for the ...*issim*...in the middle of the word! Can you spot the superlative in the motto at the top of the page?

Two new adjectives for your indexed notebook:

altus, -a, -um (AL-tus) high, deep

Related English words are “altitude” and “altimeter.”

Bible example:

*tu autem **Altissimus** in aeternum Domine* Psalm 92:8

A more helpful word order in English would be: *autem tu, Domine, **Altissimus** in aeternum*.

You will know that *tu* is “you” singular or “thou” if you know French. We will be meeting all the pronouns later on! Notice the vocative singular form *Domine*. Notice that in the Vulgate the sentence seems to lack a verb. You will need to supply “are” – you will notice if you look the text up in a Bible that has italics for words supplied in this way by the translators that they have had to supply the verb too so it must be absent in the original Hebrew.

benignus, -a, -um (ben-IG-nus) kind

A related word in English is “benign.”

Bible example:

*verumtamen diligite inimicos vestros et benefacite et mutuum date nihil desperantes et erit merces vestra multa et eritis filii **Altissimi** quia ipse **benignus** est super ingratos et malos* Luke 6:35

This is a difficult text with many words which you do not know (and do not need to know for IGCSE Latin) but I could not resist it as it has *both* the new words in it. You will have to look it up if you do not already know it well enough to guess most of it!

The text comes from Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain” and he is explaining to his disciples that *fili* (nominative plural) *Altissimi* (notice the genitive form of *Altissimus* here) should behave like their Heavenly Father who *benignus est* to the *ingratos et malos* – you can guess who they are from an English word and a Latin word you already know³.

Nihil is a useful word for your notebook. It is related to the word “nihilist” and “annihilate.”⁴

3 “Ungrateful” and *malus*.

4 The Latin word explains why annihilate has an “h” in it!