

Chapter I

Nouns of the First Declension, Nominative and Vocative Cases

The Verb Sum, Imperfective System

Predication

Wouldn't it be nice if all that was necessary in learning a new language was learning new vocabulary? We do this even in English everyday, learning new words and using old ones in new ways. Unfortunately, language learning doesn't work this way. While learning vocabulary is a must (and I mean it—if you don't learn your vocabulary you'll be able to give learned discourse on Latin verbal paradigms, but won't even understand "*Dominus vobiscum*"), the bulk of work in this course will concern grammar. Grammar is the hardest part of learning a language because it's not just different from English, it's contradictory. There are things you can't do in Latin that you can in English, and vice versa. Even more unfortunately, Latin has a lot of grammar at the beginning. You can't just string words together to form a sentence-- you must **decline** the nouns and **conjugate** the verbs. At times you'll feel like pounding your head on a desk and starting to recite the old poem:

*Latin is a language
Dead as it can be
First it killed the Romans
And now it's killing me.*

*All are dead who spoke it;
All are dead who wrote it;
All shall die who learn it;
All they well deserve it!*

At the end of this course you get to decide if these Latinists deserve death so they can take a rest, or as a fitting punishment.

Nominal Declension

We will start learning Latin with nouns. In English, nouns have two forms: the singular and the plural. We all know when to use the singular and the plural, and we could call the process of selecting one or the other declension (from the Latin *declino* "to bend aside", that is, to turn a noun from its root form to another). Every Latin noun has about twelve forms (depending on how you count them, or which noun it is). But don't panic! Many of these forms are written the same, and there are plenty of patterns to help you remember which form is which. A lot of our Latin grammar comes from the Romans themselves, who had grammar books even older than your fifth-grade English teacher! They divided all nouns into five categories based on how they are declined. We will start with the first declension, the simplest of the five.

English nouns "mark" number (that means if you look at an English noun you will know if it refers to one or many individuals). Latin likewise marks number (singular and plural, like English), but it also marks "case" (how a noun is used in a sentence). Latin nouns also have "gender". Basically, this is just used so that adjectives which describe a noun can be

distinguished more easily from other adjectives in the sentence. Gender is also important in choosing pronouns. However, it's best not to worry about gender too much at this point. Just know that Latin has masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns. The names of men and male occupations are masculine; the names of women and female occupations are feminine. Beyond that you simply have to learn the gender of each noun as you go. The good news is that almost all nouns of the first declension are feminine (the rest are masculine, and describe male occupations, at least to the Romans, like "sailor" or "farmer").

Another thing to bear in mind about Latin is that there are no words for 'a/an' and 'the'. *Via* can mean 'a road' or 'the road'.

Nominative and Vocative Case

The nominative case is used for subjects. A subject is normally the one who does some action in the sentence, or experiences some emotion or sensation. English has subjects, too, so you shouldn't have a lot of difficulty identifying what a subject is. But, if you do, the examples and your instructor should be able to give some clarity. The nominative singular is also the form used in dictionary entries.

The vocative is used for direct addresses. The English translation can usually have "O!", but may not in practice. Basically, if the speaker is talking directly to something it's in the vocative.

All nouns of the first declension have nominative singulars in -a, and only nouns of the first declension have this ending in the singular (except for a few nouns borrowed from Greek, but these are very rare). If you see a noun in the dictionary ending in -a, it's almost definitely a first declension noun. Latin declines its nouns by adding endings to the "root". Luckily, the root of a first declension noun is very easy to find: simply remove the -a from the end. Afterwards, you may add the appropriate case ending. All nouns of the first declension have the following endings for the nominative and vocative cases, whether feminine or masculine:

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	-a	-æ
Vocative	-a	-æ

You will notice that the nominative and vocative cases are identical in the first declension. In fact, other than nouns of the second declension, and some Greek nouns, the nominative and vocative are always the same. In many textbooks they are not treated as separate cases, but here they are treated as separate so that the second declension is less confusing.

Now, for an example of the declension process; we will take it step by step.

Step 1. Identify the noun (e.g., *agrícola* 'farmer').

Step 2. Take the root by removing -a from the quotation form (*agricol-*)

Step 3. Add the appropriate ending (*agricol-* + -æ = *agrícola* 'farmers').

These steps will work with any noun, except that with other declensions the root is found differently.

Introduction to Verbs and the Imperfective System of the Verb *Sum*

The most important verb to learn is the verb *sum* ‘to be’. Like all verbs, *sum* must be conjugated to mark certain information. Latin verbs mark “person”, “number”, “tense”, “voice” and “mood”. English has all of these distinctions, but mood has mostly fallen out of use. For right now we can ignore mood and voice, and focus on person, number, and tense.

Number, in Latin as in English, is a distinction between whether there is one subject or many (i.e., singular v. plural). Person is the relationship between the speaker, the person the speaker is addressing, and the subject of the sentence. The first person is used when the speaker is the subject (i.e., ‘I’ and ‘we’). The second person is used when the addressee is the subject (i.e., ‘you’) and the third person is used when neither the speaker nor the addressee is the subject (i.e., ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, and ‘they’).

Tense can be a little difficult to describe. While the English tense system is very similar to the Latin tense system, there are some disjuncts between the two. This is because Latin “tense” is actually a composite of true tense distinctions (i.e., time) and what linguists call “aspect”. Luckily, we can postpone the discussion of aspect for a while, because this problem does not arise with *sum*, and also is fairly unimportant in simple sentences. For right now it is sufficient to say that Latin has a three-way tense distinction (past, present, and future) and a two way aspect distinction, giving us six “tenses” for each voice and mood. By and large, at this stage it is best to focus on the similarity between Latin and English verb tenses, and only later worry about the slight differences.

We call the two aspects the “Imperfective” and “Perfective” Systems. The imperfective is basically for ongoing states, so *sum* ‘to be’ is almost always imperfective except in the past, as it is used to describe the state of a thing. The Imperfective System has the Past Imperfective (called the Imperfect), the Present Imperfective (called the Present) and the Future Imperfective (called the Future).

The Present and Future are used almost exactly like their English counterparts, except that English sometimes uses the Present for future events (e.g., “I’m going to the store.”), where Latin often uses the Future tense. The Imperfect is used like the English Imperfect, but is also used for repeated action in the past (e.g., “I used to run everyday.”; “The Romans were frequently fighting wars.”). The most common tense equivalences are:

Imperfect	Present	Future
<i>was singing</i> <i>used to sing</i>	<i>sings</i> <i>is singing</i> <i>does sing</i>	<i>will/shall sing</i> <i>will/shall be singing</i>

We show a verbal paradigm (all the forms a verb can take) by means of a square like this one (with the subject pronouns shown for clarity):

	Singular	Plural
1. person	I	we
2. person	you (<i>sg.</i>)	you (<i>pl.</i>)
3. person	he/she/it	they

N.B. Latin distinguishes between a singular and plural 'you'. However, unlike some European languages, Latin makes no distinction of formality (cf. Sp. *usted*, Fr. *vous*, Ger. *Sie*). The same pronoun is used for individuals of all social ranks.

The English paradigm of 'to be' is shown to give an example of how to read these tables:

Imperfect:		Present:		Future:	
I was	we were	I am	we are	I will/shall be	we will/shall be
you (<i>sg.</i>) were	you (<i>pl.</i>) were	you (<i>sg.</i>) are	you (<i>pl.</i>) are	you (<i>sg.</i>) will/shall be	you (<i>pl.</i>) will/shall be
he/she/it was	they were	he/she/it is	they are	he/she/it will/shall be	they will/shall be

The verb *sum* is highly irregular, and so its forms must be learned individually, but don't let this frighten you. Latin verbs are normally quite regular. Only *sum* and a few others have so many irregularities.

Imperfect:		Present:		Future:	
eram	erámus	sum	sumus	ero	érimus
eras	erátis	es	estis	eris	éritis
erat	erant	est	sunt	erit	erint

If you notice, most of the forms have a stem in *er-/es-*, but a few have a stem in *su-*. Noticing stems will help you in dealing with regular verbs, but here it is less important. Also, you may notice that certain endings go with each person (e.g., *-nt* for 3. person plural). It would be good to begin guessing at these patterns now, so that when we come to regular verbs you'll be ahead of the curve.

Predication

The most important use of the verb *sum* is as a copulative verb (Latin *copulo* 'to join'), that is, to link a subject and its predicate. The predicate is either an adjective phrase describing or a noun phrase renaming the subject. E.g:

Gregórius pius est.
Gregory is pious.

Latína lingua mórtua est.
Latin is a dead language.

Elizabēth regīna Britānniæ Magnæ est.
Elizabeth is the queen of Great Britain.

Galli bárbari erant.
The Gauls were barbarians.

Note that the subject and predicate in a copulative construction are both in the nominative case, and that the verb agrees with the subject. In the sentence *Galli gens magna erant*. 'The Gauls were a great people.' the verb is plural even though the predicate (*gens*) is singular. Also, it is usually the case that Latin verbs come at the end of the sentence. However, bear in mind that Latin word order is more or less free, so the verb can come anywhere (which sounds more confusing than it is); verb-final sentences are just most common.

Vocabulary

Nouns

ádvena (m/f)- foreigner
agrícola (m)- farmer
ánima (f)- soul
aqua (f)- water
María (f)- Mary
nauta (m)- sailor
terra (f)- land, earth
via (f)- way, path

Verb

sum- to be

Adverb

non- not

Conjunction

et- and
étiam- also, too

Interjection

o- oh

Exercises

I. Decline the vocabulary nouns in the nominative and vocative, singular and plural and give an English translation of each form. [Be careful not to give plural forms to nouns that wouldn't normally have plurals]

II. Translate into English:

- i.* Agrícola non sum.
- ii.* María ádvena est.
- iii.* Erant nautæ.
- iv.* O aquæ!

III. Translate into Latin:

- i.* I was not a foreigner.
- ii.* We will be sailors, too.
- iii.* Oh Mary!
- iv.* You (*pl.*) are farmers.