

Chapter 3: Second Declension

Chapter 3 covers the following: second-declension nouns mostly masculine and neuter, *-us* vs. *-er* nouns of the second declension, grammatical apposition, and Latin word order. At the end of the lesson we'll review the vocabulary you should memorize in this chapter.

Second-declension masculine nouns. Where first declension includes mostly feminine nouns with *-a-* at the end of their base, second declension includes mostly masculine and neuter nouns with *-o-* at the end of their base. The second declension has different forms from first declension but the uses of the cases are the same. However, there's another important distinction between first and second declension: the *-o-* at the end of the base in second declension is weak and it doesn't show up as *-o-* as often as the *-a-* shows up in first declension. The second-declension *-o-* can appear as *-u-*, as in the nominative singular (*-us*) or the accusative singular (*-um*) or it can appear as *-i-* as in the genitive singular and nominative plural (*-i*) and the dative and ablative plural (*-is*).

Here are the endings for second declension masculine, beginning with the singular. The nominative singular is *-us* or in some cases *-er*. We'll discuss that in a second. The genitive singular is *-i*, dative *-o*, accusative *-um*, ablative *-o*, and one of the few instances of an irregular vocative *-ĕ*. In the plural the endings are *-i*, *-orum*, *-is*, *-os*, *-is*. The vocative is regular here in the plural. It's identical to the nominative *-i*. Leaving the vocative out, let's recite those endings together. [recitation of endings]

To form a second-declension masculine noun, do the same thing you did in first declension. Take a noun that belongs to that declension, remove the *-ī* genitive singular ending from the genitive singular form to get the base, and then add the endings on. Here's an example of that process with the word *filius* meaning "son." The base is *fili-*. To that you add the endings: *filius*, *fili*, *filio*, *filium*, *filio* -- we'll talk about the vocative in a second -- *fili*, *filiorum*, *filiis*, *fili*, *filiis*. Please note that the genitive singular in some Roman authors can have only one *-i* at the end (*fili*) but we'll follow the convention used by the majority of classical authors and put two *-i*'s at the end of the word (*fili*). Also note the vocative singular of this word. The Romans didn't like taking a base that ended with *-i* and putting a short *-e* after it. That would have produced **filiē* and that sounded disagreeable to the Romans so they left the *-e* off the vocative ending if there was an *-i-* at the end of the base. Thus the vocative of *filius* is *fili*. Though the majority of the endings in second declension have long vowels in them, none of the long marks over those vowels is mandatory because none of them distinguish two different grammatical forms. So, that's one nice feature of second declension.

Now let's address a minor peculiarity involving second declension. The Romans for some reason did not like to end second-declension masculine nouns with *-rus*. So, if a base ended in *-r*, like the base *puer-* which means "boy," the Romans, instead of going **puerus* in the nominative singular, simply went *puer*. But you can see from the rest of the forms of this word the real base is *puer-* because the word declines *puer*, *pueri*, *puero* and so on.

Here's another simpler way to look at it: if a second-declension masculine noun ends *-er* in its nominative singular, you can't tell whether the *-e-* is retained in the base or not just by looking at

that one form. You have to look at the genitive singular to see whether the base does what grammarians call “contracts” or not. The Latin word *liber* meaning “book” illustrates this principle well. By just looking at the nominative singular (*liber*) it’s impossible to tell if the base contracts or not. But by looking at the genitive singular (*libri*) which does not have an *-e-*, you can see that, in fact, this word does contract, and the base of this word is *libr-*. This is the base that will be used for all the non-nominative singular forms of this word except for the vocative, but whoever talks to books? Thus, the genitive singular becomes very important with these words because it shows whether the base contracts or not. So, for instance, *puer, pueri* does not contract. But *liber, libri* does contract, as does *ager, agri*, the Roman word for “field,” from which we get words like agriculture.

These *-er* second-declension nouns demonstrate the importance of deriving the base of a Latin noun from its genitive singular, not its nominative singular, a principle that’s true of nouns all across all declensions in Latin because too often the nominative singular is irregular. And that’s why the genitive singular is listed in the vocabulary and dictionaries. It supplies the proper base. This is a very important principle so it is worth reviewing what we said in the previous lesson. To get the base of any Latin noun, drop the ending from the second form in the vocabulary, the genitive singular. With that, you’ll have the base to which to attach the proper endings. In first declension a word like *fortuna, fortunae*, f., if you drop the *-ae* genitive singular ending from the second form, you can see that the base is *fortun-*. That’s the base you use to create the all the rest of the forms. With a word like *ager, agri*, m., which we just discussed, if you drop the genitive singular ending *-i* from the second form, you can see that the base is *agr-*, and that base (with no *-e-* in it) is the base used to create all the rest of the forms after the genitive singular. While it is tempting often to use the nominative singular to get the base of a noun, because the base does often exist there in its proper form, don’t get into this habit. Too often, the nominative singular is irregular. You will do yourself a great favor now by practicing using the genitive singular to get the base. This reflex will serve you well when dealing with other types of Latin nouns later.

Second declension is one of the few categories of nouns in Latin where the vocative singular is different from the nominative singular. So, for instance, a second-declension masculine name like *Marcus* has a vocative singular ending in *-ē*: *Marce*. Likewise, the vocative of a word like *tyrannus*, meaning “tyrant,” is *tyranne*, or of *amicus* is *amice*. In all these instances the noun is being directly addressed. But there are two instances when *-e* is not used in second-declension vocative singulars. First, if the nominative singular of the second-declension noun ends in *-ius*, the vocative singular has no ending. So, for instance, the name *Vergilius*, the Latin form of the name of the great Roman poet Vergil, has a vocative *Vergili*, not **Vergilie*. Here the *-e* ending is dropped altogether. Second, if the nominative singular ends in *-er*, the vocative singular returns to its normal form in other declensions where it’s identical to the nominative singular. So, for instance, the vocative singular of the word *puer* is *puer*, not **puere*.

Now let’s explore an important grammatical principle, apposition. Just as an adjective can specify a noun -- the red car, not the blue one -- a noun can specify another noun. For example, “There goes Caesar, the general,” or “An honest person tells the truth, the greatest weapon of righteousness,” or “Here’s my wife, my beloved darling.” In each of these examples, the second noun clarifies the first noun. So, for instance, “There goes Caesar (the first noun), the general.” “The general,” the second noun, clarifies who Caesar is. In the second example, “weapon”

clarifies “truth.” And in the third example, “darling” clarifies “wife.” When a later noun modifies an earlier one in this way, the second noun is said to be an appositive, or in apposition to the first noun. In English, an appositive must be close to the noun it clarifies or it’s impossible to know which noun is being referred to. So, for instance, if we say, “Caesar loved Cleopatra, the Roman general,” grammatically that’s incorrect because Cleopatra was not a Roman general. To correct this so that the appositive is closer to what it’s specifying, English speakers must say, “Caesar, the Roman general, loved Cleopatra.” But in Latin, appositives and the nouns they modify do not have to be next to each other because Latin has something English doesn’t; it has grammatical case endings that can show agreement. So a Latin appositive only has to be in the same case as the noun it’s clarifying, it doesn’t have to be next to it. Here’s an example, “*Fama, ira magna, populum non servat,*” meaning, “Rumor, which is really, great anger, does not keep the people safe.” In Latin, it’s possible to rearrange the word order and not affect the meaning of the sentence. A Roman, for instance, could say, “*Fama populum non servat, ira magna.*” Literally, “Rumor does not save the people, great anger,” a word order that would make no sense in English. But even with the words in this order, Romans would know *ira* clarifies *fama* because *ira* and *fama* are in the same case, the nominative singular.

And that raises an issue we’ve mentioned before but it’s worth reiterating. Latin does not use word order to convey grammar the way English does. So, for instance, in English if you say, “The money sees the boy,” you said something that makes no sense by the rules of English grammar. To phrase the thought properly, you must say, “The boy sees the money,” because in English, word order conveys grammatical function. But in Latin that’s not true. While word order can be important, it is not essential to the meaning of a sentence the way it is in English. So for instance, you can say these words in the same order, “*Puer videt pecuniam,*” “The boy sees the money,” but in Latin you could also say, “*Pecuniam videt puer,*” “The money sees the boy,” and know that *puer* is the subject from its form and *pecuniam* the object because of its form, and therefore the sentence means the same thing no matter the order of the words. It’s not that word order doesn’t matter at all in Latin, there is, in fact, a typical order words come in. Most often Latin sentences go: subject, object, verb. For instance, “*Puer pecuniam videt,*” a pattern that Latin passed on to a number of its daughter languages, the Romance languages, which is a helpful thing to know if you go on to study Spanish, or Italian, or French. All in all, what’s important to remember here is that case, not word order, conveys grammatical function in Latin.

Now let’s look at the vocabulary for Chapter 3.

The first word is *amicus, amici*, m., meaning “friend,” a second-declension masculine noun. Note that “2” is the abbreviation for the second declension and “m.” is the abbreviation for masculine. Remember, to get the base of any second-declension noun, drop the *-i* from the second dictionary form, the genitive singular, in this case, the base of *amicus* is *amic-*

The next word is *filius, filii*, m., meaning “son.” It’s also a second-declension masculine noun. As we said before, *-ii* at the end of the genitive singular for this word is not a diphthong but two syllables separated by a /y/ sound and it’s pronounced *fee-lee-yee*.

The next word, *numerus, numeri*, m., meaning “number” is also second-declension masculine. The abbreviation *-i* after the nominative singular indicates that the word is a regular second-

declension noun. This word *numerus* can also mean “company,” as in, “you are in the number of your friends,” meaning “in the company of your friends.”

The next word, *populus, populi*, m., means “people.” Another second-declension masculine noun. The base of this word is *popul-*.

The next word is yet another second-declension masculine noun, *puer, pueri*, m., meaning “boy,” or in the plural, “children.” Latin has a tendency that if there is even one male in a group, the entire group is expressed in the masculine gender. That’s why the plural of this word (*pueri*) can mean children, including boys and girls, because it is presumed there is at least one boy in this group. *Puer* is an *-er* noun as we discussed above and it does not contract. Thus its base is *puer* (with an e). And finally, please note that this word means “boy” not “son.” That’s an easy mistake to make.

The next word is *sapientia, sapientiae*, f., meaning “wisdom.” This is a first-declension feminine noun. Be careful, not all the vocabulary here fits into the category of the new grammar we’ve learned this chapter.

The next word is *vir, viri*, m., meaning “man,” that is, a male human being. It’s a second-declension masculine noun and no, this is not where we get the word virus.

The next word *pauci, paucae* meaning “few” or “a few,” is an adjective that exists only in the plural because obviously few cannot be singular. That’s why the vocabulary lists it with only its plural forms (*-i* and *-ae*).

The next word *Romanus, Romana*, meaning “Roman,” is another adjective but this one is regular and has both singular and plural forms.

The next word is *de* meaning “from,” “down from,” “about,” “concerning.” It’s a preposition that takes the ablative case. It has both a physical meaning, “down from,” as in *de Olympo*, “down from Olympus,” and an abstract meaning, “about,” “concerning,” as in *de sapientiā*, “about wisdom.”

The next word, *in*, is also a preposition. It means “in” or “on” and it takes the ablative case, for example, *in patriā* meaning “in the fatherland.” Later we’ll learn that this preposition can also take the accusative case, and when it does, it changes the meaning of the word from “in” or “on” to “into” or “onto.”

The next word, *semper*, meaning “always,” is an adverb. You’re going to learn to love adverbs in Latin because they do not decline or conjugate and thus they don’t change form very often. So *semper* is *semper semper*. And, by the way, to show what it goes with, it most often comes directly in front of the word it modifies.

The last word in this vocabulary list is a verb, *habeo, habere*: “have,” “hold,” “possess,” “consider,” a second-conjugation verb. It has a physical sense, “hold in one’s hand,” and a mental sense, “hold in one’s mind,” that is, “consider.”

Before concluding this lesson, let’s practice with nouns and adjectives. Please decline and translate *numerus magnus* in all its cases and numbers. As we did in Chapter 2, please pause this presentation, do this practice exercise on a sheet of paper, then return to the presentation to check

your answers. Here is the declension of *numerus magnus*. And here's the translation of *numerus magnus*.

That's it for Chapter 3. For the next class exercise, please print out a copy of the practice and review sentences for Chapter 3 on page 16 of Wheelock.

Salvete discipuli!