

Grammar Terms in English, Latin and Greek

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The Latin derivation of all the English terms listed (except *aorist*, *middle*, *root* and *stem*) is self-evident, although some of the more recent additions may be modern Latin rather than derivatives of attested classical or medieval Latin terms. The majority came into English by way of French. The Latin terms shown, if not cited in the OLD, are dated (if possible) with the earliest citation (all CE) in Lewis & Short, which (more than the OLD) includes many church fathers and late pagans like Martianus Capella (fl. early 5th c. CE). Most of the Latin terms seem to be translations of Greek terms, with a few transliterations (*grammatica*, *syllaba*). The Greek terms are mostly from Dionysios Thrax (D.T., 170 - 90 BCE, based on my translation of the pertinent portions), with occasional alternatives from later grammarians. LSJ most often cites Apollonius Dyscolus (fl. 2nd c. CE), who was the father of Aelius Herodianus (ca. 180 - 250 CE) and was cited by Priscian (fl. 500 CE) as *grammaticorum princeps*.

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
ablative, c. 1440	<i>ablatiuus (casus)</i>	ἀφαιρετική (πτῶσις)	
accent, 1581	<i>accentum</i>	προσῳδία, τόνος	
accusative, c. 1440	<i>accusatiuus (casus)</i>	αἰτιατική (πτῶσις) or κατ' αἰτιατῆν	pertaining to that which is caused or affected (τὸ αἰτιατόν)
acute (accent),	<i>acutus</i>	ὀξεῖα (προσῳδία), ὀξύς (τόνος)	
active (voice), 1530 (1388?) ¹	<i>actiuus</i>	ἐνέργεια	D.T. uses a noun rather than an adjective.
adjective, 1414	<i>adiectiuus</i> (4th c.)	ἐπίθετον (ὄνομα)	Even in English, the word "adjective" was originally an adjective.

¹The OED actually cites Palsgrave 1530 as the earliest attestation of "active" in the sense of grammatical voice, but perhaps they overlooked this item from Wycliffe's *Prolegomena* 57, 1388: "A participle of a present tens, either preterit, of actif vois, . . . mai be resoluid into a verbe of the same tens, and a coniunccioun copulatif."

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
adverb, 1530	<i>aduerbium</i>	ἐπίρρημα	
agreement, 1669 (agree, 1530)		ἀκολουθία	
aorist, 1581		ἀόριστος (χρόνος)	
article, 1530	<i>articulus</i>	ἄρθρον	Stoic grammarians categorized personal pronouns as ἄρθρα ὠρισμένα (defined), and other pronouns and demonstrative adjectives, including definite articles, as ἄρθρα ἀοριστώδη (indefinite)
aspect, 1853			English term first attested in a grammar of Russian.
case, 1393	<i>casus, -us, m.</i>	πτῶσις	
circumflex (accent), c. 1577	<i>circumflexus</i>	περισπωμένη (προσωδία)	
clause, 1225	<i>clausula</i>	κῶλον	ML <i>clausa</i> is apparently from <i>clausula</i> , since <i>clausa</i> itself does not appear in Classical Latin
comparative, 1447	<i>comparatiuum</i>	συγκριτικόν (εἶδος)	
compound, 1530	<i>compositum (verbum)</i>	σύνθετος	
conjugation, 1528	<i>declinatio</i>	ἡ κλίσις, -εως, συζυγία	
conjunction, 1388	<i>coniunctio</i>	σύνδεσμος	
consonant, 1308	<i>consonans</i> or <i>consona</i> (<i>littera</i>)	(plural) ἄφωνα or σύμφωνα (γράμματα)	ἄφωνα later and more logically applied to voiceless consonants; σύμφωνα is logical because they are sounded along with vowels

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
dativus, c. 1440	<i>dativus (casus)</i>	δοτική or ἐπισταλτική (πτῶσις)	ἐπισταλτικός also means "epistolary"
declension, 1565	<i>declinatio</i>	ἡ κλίσις, -εως, συζυγία	
diminutive, 1580	<i>deminutivus (nomen) or deminutivum (3rd c.)</i>	ὑποκοριστικόν (εἶδος)	
diphthong, 1483	<i>diphthongus (fem.)</i>	δίφθογγος, ἡ	
dual, 1607	<i>dualis (numerus)</i>	δυϊκός (ἀριθμός)	
feminine, c. 1400	<i>femininus (genus)</i>	θηλυκόν (γένος)	
finite, 1795	<i>finītus (?)</i>	παρεμφατικός, ἡ (ἔγκλισις)	LSJ cites Dionysius of Halicarnassus. OLD cites Varro as referring not to verbs but to definite pronouns or adjectival pronouns like <i>hic</i> , as opposed to <i>quis</i> .
future, 1530	<i>futurum (tempus)</i>	μέλλων (χρόνος)	
gender, 1380	<i>genus</i>	γένος	Arist. <i>Rhetoric</i> : τὰ γένη τῶν ὀνομάτων terminology attributed to Protagoras
genitive, 1398	<i>genetivus or patricus (casus)</i>	γενική or κτητική or πατρική (πτῶσις)	OED says L. <i>genetivus</i> and <i>patricus</i> are erroneous translations of Gr. <i>genikē</i> , which meant "generic" (as opposed to special), rather than "connected with birth," but D.T. lists πατρική as an alternative, which doesn't mean "generic."
gerund, 1513	<i>gerundium (4th c.)</i>		
gerundive, 1612			OED says <i>gerundivus</i> is Late Latin

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
grammar, 1362	<i>grammatica</i>	γραμματική (τέχνη)	
grave (accent),	<i>gravis</i>	βαρεῖα (προσῳδία), βαρύς (τόνος)	
imperative, 1530	<i>(modus) imperativus</i> (5th c.)	προστακτική (ἔγκλισις)	
imperfect, 1530	<i>infectum (tempus)</i>	παρατατικός (χρόνος)	παρατατικός is from παρατείνω.
imperfective (aspect), 1887			English term first attested regarding Slavic languages (see "aspect"); apparently someone coined this word in English.
indeclinable, 1530	<i>indeclinabilis</i>	ἄκλιτος	
indicative, 1530	<i>indicatiuus</i> (4th c.)	ὀριστική (ἔγκλισις)	
infinitive, 1520	<i>infinitiuus, infinitus modus, impersonativus, insignatiuus</i>	ἄπαρέμφατος, ἡ (ἔγκλισις)	D.T. doesn't explain <i>why</i> he calls the infinitive a "mood," but at least this may explain the somewhat illogical tradition.
inflection/inflexion, 1668	<i>declinatio</i>	κλίσις or ἔγκλισις	ἔγκλισις also means "mood"
instrumental, 1806			English term first attested in a Sanskrit grammar; <i>instrumentalis</i> is Middle Latin.
jussive, 1846			English term first attested in a Latin grammar; apparently someone coined this word in English.
locative, 1841			English term first attested in a Sanskrit grammar; apparently someone coined this word in English.

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
masculine, 1390	<i>masculus</i> or <i>uirilis</i> (<i>genus</i>)	ἄρσενικόν (γένος)	
middle (voice), 1751		μεσότης or μέση διάθεσις	D.T. uses a noun rather than an adjective. English term first attested in a book on language and "universal" (!) grammar. ²
mood, 1450	<i>modus</i>	ἐγκλίσις	English "mood" is a variant of "mode." Latin <i>modus</i> also referred to the <u>voice</u> of a verb.
neuter, 1398	<i>neuter</i> (<i>genus</i>)	οὐδέτερον (γένος)	
nominative, 1387	<i>rectus</i> or <i>nominatiuus</i> (<i>casus</i>)	ὀρθή or ὀνομαστική or εὐθεῖα (πτῶσις)	
noun, 1398	<i>nomen</i>	ὄνομα	
number, 1398	<i>numerus</i>	ἄριθμός	
oblique, 1530	<i>obliquus</i> (<i>casus</i>)	πλαγία (πτῶσις)	
optative, c. 1450	<i>optatiuus</i> (4th c.)	ἡ εὐκτική (ἐγκλισις)	
paragraph, c. 1500	<i>paragraphus</i> (post-classical)	παράγραφος	Latin <i>paragraphus</i> is post-classical; the Greek is Hellenistic; cf. Attic παραγραφή.

²In 1751, James Harris (1709-1780) published *Hermes: or, A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Language and Universal Grammar*. Clive Probyn notes in *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers* that "Harris's ideas have been noted as strikingly similar to those of Ferdinand de Saussure (*langue/parole*) and Chomsky (*competence* and *performance*)." However, the concept of universal grammar dates back at least to Roger Bacon (ca. 1219 - 1294), who apparently inspired the 13th century school of "speculative grammarians" and Thomas of Erfurt's early 14th century treatise *De modis significandi sive grammatica speculativa*, which was incorrectly attributed to John Duns Scotus until the early 20th century. [Isn't Wikipedia wonderful?]

English term, with the date first attested in a grammatical sense (OED citations)	Classical Latin grammatical term	Classical Greek grammatical term	Comment
parse, 1570			
part of speech, 1517	<i>pars orationis</i>	λέξις (?)	Luschnig (p. 149) translates λέξις in D.T. as "part of speech" but "word" would also work
participle, 1398	<i>participium</i>	μετοχή	
particle, 1533	<i>particula</i>	παραθήκη	Longinus? – not in LSJ, cited in Yonge ³
passive (voice), 1450	<i>passivus</i>	πάθος	D.T. uses a noun rather than an adjective.
past, see "preterite"	–	–	
perfect, 1500	<i>perfectum (tempus)</i>	παρακείμενος (χρόνος)	
perfective (aspect), 1844			English term first attested regarding Slavic languages (see "aspect"). In Priscian, <i>perfectivus</i> applies to prepositional prefixes and conjunctions.
person, 1398	<i>persona</i>	πρόσωπον	the πρόσωπα are, as in English, πρῶτον, δεύτερον and τρίτον.
pluperfect, 1530	<i>(tempus praeteritum) plusquam perfectum</i>	ὑπερσυντέλικος (χρόνος)	
plural, 1377	<i>pluralis</i>	πληθυντικός (ἄριθμός)	
possessive, 1530	<i>possessivus</i>	κτητικόν (εἶδος)	

³C.D. Yonge, *An English-Greek Lexicon*, American Book Company, New York, copyright 1870 by Harper & Brothers.

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preposition, 1388	<i>praepositio</i> (originally included prefixes)	πρόθεσις	
present, 1388	<i>praesens (tempus)</i>	ἐνεστώς (χρόνος)	
preterite, 1388	<i>praeteritum (tempus)</i>	παρεληλυθώς or παρωχημένος (χρόνος)	
pronoun, 1530	<i>pronomem</i>	ἀντωνυμία	
reflexive, 1837		αὐτοπαθής or ἀντανεκλώμενος or ἀντανεκλαστική (ἀντωνυμία)	English term first attested in a Syriac grammar; apparently someone coined this word in English. Classical Latin does not have the adjective <i>reflexivus</i> .
root, 1530	<i>radix</i>		
sentence, 1447	<i>sententia</i>	τὸ ῥῆμα	Used in English in its non-grammatical sense much earlier.
singular, 1387	<i>singularis (numerus)</i>	ἐνικός (ἀριθμός)	
stem, 1851			
subjunctive (mood), 1530	<i>subjunctiuus (modus)</i>	ὑποτακτική (ἔγκλισις)	
substantive, 1509	<i>substantiuus (5th c.)</i>		
superlative, 1386	<i>superlatiuum</i>	ὑπερθετικόν (εἶδος)	
syllable, 1384	<i>syllaba</i>	συλλαβή	
tense, 1388	<i>tempus</i>	χρόνος	
verb, 1388	<i>uerbum</i>	ῥῆμα	

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vocative, c. 1440	<i>vocatiuus (casus)</i>	κλητική or προσαγορευτική (πτῶσις)	
voice, 1382	<i>modus</i>	διάθεσις	
vowel, 1308	<i>vocalis (littera)</i>	(plural) φωνῶντα, φωνήεντα (γράμματα)	
word, c. 900	<i>verbum</i>	λόγος, ὄνομα	

Some frequently cited early English authors:

1382, 1388: John Wycliffe, *Prolegomena* to his English Bible

(after) 1398: J. Trevisa, tr. Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De Proprietatibus Rerum*

1530: Jehan Palsgrave, *Lesclarcissement de la langue françoise*