

LESSON 2

A Grammar Lesson: Making Polite Requests A Selection from Johannes Posselius' *Colloquia Familiaria*

Author of Lesson:	Professor Diane Johnson (Western Washington University, diane.johnson@wwu.edu)
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Historical Context:	Sixteenth Century Germany
Full Text Online:	Entire text of <i>Colloquia Familiaria</i> (Rostock, 1588), in transcription at http://www.wwu.edu/mcl/classical/new/gallery/possellius%20colloquia%20greek%20text%202%20pdf.pdf .
Level:	Elementary
Focus and Appeal:	Twenty-seven Latin requests from “How to Ask for Something from the Teacher” illustrate both the warm, chatty quality of the <i>Colloquia</i> and the resources it offers for the first- and second-year Latin classroom.
Learning Objectives:	Ample practice in using various jussive structures, that is, in drilling the various ways of making polite requests and giving courteous commands. Because when one is making a polite request one often has to justify oneself, expressions of purpose are also presented in a variety of formats. Students who require review of the present subjunctive can use these sentences to practice forms. All students will benefit from reading through the <i>Colloquia</i> aloud.
Lesson Includes:	Background, Further Reading, Suggestions for Use, Latin text with English translation, and Latin text without translation

BACKGROUND

Johannes Posselius the Elder (Johannes Possel) was born in the village of Parchim in the North German state of Mecklenberg in 1528. He studied at the University of Rostock from 1542-1545, then took a series of teaching jobs before settling back at Rostock in 1553, where he remained until his death in 1591. A talented and committed Professor of Greek, Posselius made a significant contribution to the teaching of this language through the publication of his *Syntaxis Graeca*, *Calligraphia Oratoria Linguae Graecae*, and *Colloquia*. He was also a devout Lutheran. To demonstrate how a knowledge of Greek could contribute to the Lutheran community, he published renditions of Luther's *Catechism* and the Bible readings of the church year in Greek epic verse.

The following selection from Posselius' *Colloquia Familiaria* illustrates some of the pedagogical qualities of this author's works. During the sixteenth century—as indeed had been the case for many centuries before—Latin was the language of school. Children enrolled in urban schools throughout Europe needed to acquire Latin conversational fluency as quickly as possible in order to advance into the higher grades. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a number of conversational manuals called *Colloquia* had been printed and sold in Europe: these little texts provided useful phrases and vocabulary for students practicing their classroom Latin. Like modern “teach yourself” language handbooks, the *Colloquia* presented little scenes in which children were featured interacting with each other and with the adults around them, at home, in the classroom and in the countryside, shopping and eating, washing and working, playing and quarreling in Latin. Posselius' *Colloquia Familiaria* shares these features, but adds something new: Greek phrases along with the Latin. In his Greek introduction to the text, Posselius states that his goal is to make his students' abilities in both languages equally strong. In the following exercise, I have omitted the Greek equivalents of the Latin phrases.

FURTHER READING

L. Massebieau. *Les colloques scolaires du seizième siècle et leurs auteurs* (1480-1570). Paris 1878. (Although this study is over a century old, it still makes very entertaining and informative reading about a genre much practiced by Humanists. Massebieau uses the colloquia as sources for data on teaching and learning in the Latin classroom.)

Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine. *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986. (In this work the authors examine the manner in which the language and literature studied by the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanists enters the educational establishment.)

Federica Ciccolella, *Donati Graeci: Learning Greek in the Renaissance*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. (Ciccolella's study examines some of the texts used to teach Latin and Greek during the Renaissance.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE OF THIS LESSON

- Take a look at the Latin texts below. You will notice that there are two different formats: the first includes my translations of the sentences presented in the *Colloquia*, the second does not. You'll want to decide which one works best for your students. Teachers wanting a supplementary exercise may prefer to keep the translations; those seeking to challenge their students a little more rigorously may prefer the Latin-only format.
- Make copies of the text and distribute them to your students.
- Ask the students to read through the dialogue for content.
- Ask the students to explain the two main ways in which requests are made in the *Colloquia*. You'll notice that Posselius presents both the imperative and the jussive subjunctive; however, he limits the imperative to just a few scenarios:
 1. When the student asks the teacher for something specific and immediate, s/he uses the imperative: drawing lines for the student to trace, supplying a special phrase in the target language for immediate use, demanding a specific assignment.
 2. When the request is for a favor (usually permission to break the classroom routine), the jussive subjunctive is the preferred format, either alone or with an introductory verb:
 - (a) the simple jussive appears in *liceat, concedas* ; note that *liceat* is used with the infinitive (#1, #4, #5).
 - (b) the extended jussive is used in phrases such as the following
precor ut . . . (#2)
oro ut . . . (#3)
quaeso ut . . . (#7)
rogo ut . . . (#13)
 - (c) Sometimes we see a very polite amalgamation such as *quaeso ut liceat*
 - (d) Note the negative phrase *cave ne* + subjunctive, used by the teacher to prevent the student from doing something annoying. (#19)
 3. Posselius uses a third option only once in this chapter: the question of appeal: *Quomodo haec legam?* "How am I supposed to read this?" (#24). This is a nice alternative to *Doce quomodo haec legam*.
- Ask the students to isolate the ways in which the speaker expresses the reason for his or her request. In this regard, two main grammatical structures will appear:
 1. The gerund or gerundive in the genitive case with *causā* and *gratiā* (#1, #5)
 2. The gerund or gerundive + a form of *esse* and the agent in the dative case.

Depending upon the level of the class, the teacher may want to identify a third means of expressing purpose in the form of a relative clause with the subjunctive, as appears in the sentence, *Oro te Praeceptor ut mihi describas figuras elementorum Graecorum, quas scribendo imiter* (#15)

- Have the students restate the jussive phrases in the passive, e.g. *Precor ut facias mihi facultatem manendi domi* (#2) can be turned thus: *Precor ut fiat mihi facultas manendi domi*. Or move from singular to plural, and drill the second and third person along with the first.
- Advanced students will be challenged by putting the various requests into indirect discourse. For example, #2 from the *Colloquia* can be turned into a narrative, as in *Joannes discipulus dixit amico Petro se praeceptorem iam rogasse ut facultatem domi manendi postero die faceret*

LATIN TEXT WITH ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Selections from Johannes Posselius, "*Petendi Quippiam a Praeceptore Formulae*" How to Ask for Something from the Teacher

COMING AND GOING

1. Observande praeceptor, quaeso ut liceat mihi schola abesse hora prima, lavandi causā.

Teacher, please allow me to be absent from class at 1:00, in order to do the laundry.

2. Precor ut facias mihi facultatem manendi domi. Est enim mihi aliquid efficiendum.

Please give me permission to stay home, as I have something I must do.

3. Est mihi abeundum rus cum parentibus meis; id, ut tua pace fiat, oro.

I have to go with my parents to the country. Please let me do so.

4. Concedas mihi potestatem exeundi, causā levandi alvi [solvendi ventrem, reddendae urinae].

Give me permission to go outside; I have to relieve myself [pee].

5. Liceat mihi currere domum afferendi libelli cuiuspiam gratiā.

Please let me go back home to fetch a book.

6. Liceat mihi ludo litterario [schola] exire ad emendum papyrum [pennam, panem].

Let me leave the school in order to buy some paper [a pen, some bread].

7. Quispiam me prae foribus conventum expetit. Quaeso itaque ut liceat mihi tua pace ad hunc exire.

There's somebody at the door who wants to speak with me. Please give me permission to go out to him.

8. Dominus [Pater] meus iussit me domum redire decima [prima, tertia], id ut mihi liceat facere, oro.

My master [father] bade me return home at 10:00 [1:00, 3:00]. Please let me go.

ILLNESS

9. Dolet mihi caput. Dolent mihi dentes. Dolet mihi ventriculus.

My head [teeth, stomach] hurts.

10. Nasus stillat sanguinem.

I've got a bloody nose.

11. Male habeo, ideo quaeso, ut mihi liceat domum ire.

I feel sick. So please let me go home.

12. Amantissime Praeceptor, Johannes petit sibi absentem veniam dari.

Dearest Teacher, John asks that you excuse his absence.

READING AND WRITING

13. Clarissime Praeceptor, heri libellum quendam amisi, quem nondum recepi. Rogo igitur te, ut admoneas condiscipulos, ut si quis forte eum invenerit, mihi restituat.

Dearest Teacher, yesterday I lost a book that I haven't recovered yet. So please tell the other students that, if someone find it, he give it back to me.

14. Clarissime Praeceptor, doce me quibus verbis dicam Graece, "Johannes me verberavit."

Most noble Teacher, teach me how to say in Greek, "Johannes hit me."

15. Oro te Praeceptor ut mihi describas figuras elementorum Graecorum, quas scribendo imiter.

Please Teacher, write me the shapes of the Greek letters I'm supposed to copy out.

16. Ubi habes archetypum, quem ante paucos dies tibi praescripsi?

Where do you keep the template that I wrote out for you a few days ago?

17. Eum per incuriam amisi.

I was careless and lost it.

18. Johannes eum mihi discersit.

Johannes ripped it up.

19. En, habes iam alium. Cave ne et hunc perdas.

Here, now you have another. Be careful not to lose this one too.

20. Quaeso, Praeceptor, ut praepares mihi pennam hanc.

Please Teacher, fix this pen for me.

21. Qualem pennam cupis?

How do you want your pen?

22. Attempera ad manum tuam.

Suit it to your hand.

23. Doce me haec legere.

Teach me how to read this.

24. Quomodo haec legam?

How am I supposed to read this?

25. Praescribe mihi quantum ediscam hac hora.

Tell me how much I'm supposed to read at this time.

26. Duc mihi lineas.

Draw the lines for me.

27. Non habeo atramentum.

I'm out of ink.

LATIN TEXT WITHOUT ENGLISH TRANSLATION

**Selections from Johannes Posselius, "*Petendi Quippiam a Praeceptore Formulae*"
How to Ask for Something from the Teacher**

COMING AND GOING

1. **Observande praeceptor, quaeso ut liceat mihi schola abesse hora prima, lavandi causā.**
2. **Precor ut facias mihi facultatem manendi domi. Est enim mihi aliquid efficiendum.**
3. **Est mihi abeundum rus cum parentibus meis; id, ut tua pace fiat, oro.**
4. **Concedas mihi potestatem exeundi, causā levandi alvi [solvendi ventrem, reddendae urinae].**
5. **Liceat mihi currere domum afferendi libelli cuiuspiam gratiā.**
6. **Liceat mihi ludo litterario [schola] exire ad emendum papyrum [pennam, panem].**
7. **Quispiam me prae foribus conventum expetit. Quaeso itaque ut liceat mihi tua pace ad hunc exire.**
8. **Dominus [Pater] meus iussit me domum redire decima [prima, tertia], id ut mihi liceat facere, oro.**

ILLNESS

9. Dolet mihi caput. Dolent mihi dentes. Dolet mihi ventriculus.
10. Nasus stillat sanguinem.
11. Male habeo, ideo quaeso, ut mihi liceat domum ire.
12. Amantissime Praeceptor, Johannes petit sibi absentem veniam dari.

READING AND WRITING

13. Clarissime Praeceptor, heri libellum quendam amisi, quem nondum recepi. Rogo igitur te, ut admoneas condiscipulos, ut si quis forte eum invenerit, mihi restituat.
14. Clarissime Praeceptor, doce me quibus verbis dicam Graece, "Johannes me verberavit."
15. Oro te Praeceptor ut mihi describas figuras elementorum Graecorum, quas scribendo imiter.
16. Ubi habes archetypum, quem ante paucos dies tibi praescripsi?
17. Eum per incuriam amisi.
18. Johannes eum mihi discerpsit.
19. En, habes iam alium. Cave ne et hunc perdas.
20. Quaeso, Praeceptor, ut praepares mihi pennam hanc.
21. Qualem pennam cupis?
22. Attempera ad manum tuam.
23. Doce me haec legere.

24. Quomodo haec legam?

25. Praescribe mihi quantum ediscam hac hora.

26. Duc mihi lineas.

27. Non habeo atramentum.