

1: Old English Basics and Nominals



Figure: Northwestern Europe c. 400 (map: public domain / WMC)

Script

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f ū þ ō r c g w h n ī g ē p e s t b e m l i ē d ā æ y ī ē
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A Æ B C D E F G H I L M N O P R S T þ Ð U Ƴ Y
a æ b c d e f g h i l m n o p r s t þ ð u Ƴ y

A Taste of Old English

Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People

“

Breton ist garsecges ealond, ðæt wæs iu geara Albion haten: is geseted betwyh norðdæle and westdæle, Germanie and Gallie and Hispanie þam mæstum dælum Europe mycclæ fæce ongegen. Þæt is norð ehta hund mila lang, and tu hund mila brad. Hit hafað fram suðdæle þa mægþe ongean, þe mon hateþ Gallia Bellica. Hit is welig þis ealond on wæstmum and on treowum misenlicra cynna; and hit is gescræpe on læswe sceapa and neata; and on sumum stowum wingeardas growaþ. Swylce eac þeos eorþe is berende missenlicra fugela and sæwihta, and fiscwyllum wæterum and wyllgespryngum.

”

A Fusional Language

Language Types

1. Synthetic: High morpheme-per-word ratio
 - a. Fusional: overlay of morphemes (Latin, German, Old English)
 - b. Agglutinative: affixation of morphemes (Finnish)
2. Analytic: low morpheme-per-word ratio (Chinese, English)

m	singular	plural
Nom.	stān	stānas
Acc.	stān	stānas
Gen.	stānes	stāna
Dat.	stāne	stānum

Flexible Word Order: English vs German

The servant	seeks	the king
The king	seeks	the servant

	Der Diener	sucht	den König
	Den König	sucht	der Diener
dass	der Diener	den König	sucht
	Den König	der Diener	sucht
	Der König	sucht	den Diener

Flexible Word Order: Modern English vs Old English

The servant	seeks	the king
The king	seeks	the servant

Se þēow	sēceð	þone cyning
Þone cyning	sēceð	se þēow
Þone cyning	se þēow	sēceð
Se þēow	þone cyning	sēceð
Se cyning	sēceð	þone þēaw

German Parallels

Ic	geseo	minne	cyning
Ich	sehe	meinen	König

Him	wæs	þearf	micel
Ihm	war	Bedarf	großer

þa	wæs	Sarran	sar	on	mode
Dann	war('s)	Sara	schmerzhaft	am	Herzen

Nominals: Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives

Old English nominals inflect for:

- ▶ **case**: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, (instrumental);
- ▶ **number**: singular, (dual,) plural;
- ▶ **gender**: masculine, neuter, feminine;
- ▶ pronouns also inflect for **person**: first, second, third.

Case

These are the basic uses of the cases:

Nominative	subject, subject complement, address
Accusative	direct object, object complement
Genitive	possession, description, adverbial uses (note the partitive genitive construction)
Dative	interest, possession, adverbial uses (e.g. time), comparison, (absolute)
Instrumental	means/manner, comparison, (accompaniment), time

Nominative

- ▶ Se cyning is gōd
- ▶ Ælfred wæs Westseaxna cyning
- ▶ Lā æلميhtiga God and ealra cyninga cyning

Accusative

- ▶ Ic gesēo mīnne cyning
- ▶ Þū hine ongēate unweorðne

Genitive

- ▶ Æðelflāed wæs þæs cyninges dohtor
 - ▶ Angle sind swā fāgeres hiwes menn
 - ▶ Hē wunode on dūnum dāges and nihtes
 - ▶ Fiftyna sum sundwudu sōhte
 - ▶ Se wæs þāra manna mōdgast ealra
-

Dative

- ▶ Hē geaf his dohtor Burgrēde cyninge
- ▶ Þā wearð God þām werode wrāð
- ▶ Him wæs þearf micel
- ▶ Dægtidum ic oft spæte sperebrōgan
- ▶ Hīe wæron englum gelice
- ▶ (þām gedōnum andswarige eall chor)

Instrumental

- ▶ Se palm þe drihten sylf sette his āgenum handum
 - ▶ Þā wæs gāst ofer holm boren miclum spēdum
 - ▶ Þy̅ geara wæs senoð æt Heorotforde
 - ▶ Barrabas wæs þær þy̅ sīðe on bendum
 - ▶ Man bið þy̅ strengra þe hē bið micel on his lichoman
 - ▶ Ic ðē mæg sum bispell secgan, þæt þū meht þy̅
sweotolor ongitan
-

Prepositions

<i>be</i> “about, near”	+dat.	be streame
<i>ymb</i> “about, after”	+acc.	ymb stream
<i>andlang</i> “along”	+gen.	andlang streames
<i>mid</i> “with”	+dat./acc./inst.	mid stream(e)
<i>wið</i> “against, towards”	+acc./dat.	wið stream(e)

With many locative prepositions, motion dictates case:

Preposition	Stasis/Dative	Motion/Accusative
in	þām hūse	þæt hūs
ofer	þām staðe	þone sǣ
under	þām hrægle	þæt hrægel

Cf. German *in der Stadt* vs. *in die Stadt*;

Latin *in ecclēsiā* vs. *in ecclēsiam*.

Distal Demonstrative Pronoun *se*

	Masc. sg.	Neut. sg.	Fem. sg.	Plural
Nom.	<i>se</i>	<i>þæt</i>	<i>sēo</i>	<i>þā</i>
Acc.	<i>þone</i>	<i>þæt</i>	<i>þā</i>	<i>þā</i>
Gen.	<i>þæs</i>	<i>þæs</i>	<i>þære</i>	<i>þāra</i>
Dat.	<i>þām</i>	<i>þām</i>	<i>þære</i>	<i>þām</i>
Inst.	<i>þȳ</i>	<i>þȳ</i>		

- ▶ Se cyning is dēad
- ▶ Ic sēo þone cyning
- ▶ Ic eom þæs cyninges sunu
- ▶ Ic hier e þām cyninge
- ▶ Þȳ sweorde ic hine ofslōh

Proximal Demonstrative Pronoun *þes*

	Masc. sg.	Neut. sg.	Fem. sg.	Plural
Nom.	þes	þis	þēos	þās
Acc.	þisne	þis	þās	þās
Gen.	þisses	þisses	þisse	þissa
Dat.	þissum	þissum	þisse	þissum
Inst.	þȳs	þȳs		

Personal Pronouns: First Person

	1 sg.	1 dual	1 pl.
Nom.	ic	wit	wē
Acc.	mē	unc	ūs
Gen.	mīn	uncer	ūre
Dat.	mē	unc	ūs

Personal Pronouns: Second Person

	2 sg.	2 dual	2 pl.
Nom.	þū	git	gē
Acc.	þē	inc	ēow
Gen.	þīn	incer	ēower
Dat.	þē	inc	ēow

Personal Pronoun: Third Person

	Masc. sg.	Neut. sg.	Fem. sg.	Plural
Nom.	hē	hit	hēo	hīe
Acc.	hine	hit	hīe	hīe
Gen.	his	his	hire	hira
Dat.	him	him	hire	him

Interrogative Pronoun

	Masc./fem.	Neut.
Nom.	hwā	hwæt
Acc.	hwone	hwæt
Gen.	hwæs	hwæs
Dat.	hwām	hwām
Inst.	hwȳ	hwȳ

Weak Versus Strong

German adjectives:

- ▶ Strong adjectives typically convey more precise grammatical information.

großer Einfluss; cf.

großen Einfluss

- ▶ Weak adjectives have simplified inflection, thus have to be analyzed using their modifiers and governing verbs.

Der Kopf gehört dem großen Mann.

That head belongs to the tall man.

Weak Versus Strong

Old English nouns and adjectives:

- ▶ Strong nouns/adjectives typically convey more precise grammatical information.

Stānes gecynd is heard.

A stone's nature is firm.

He geseah sumne hārne stān.

He saw a grey rock.

- ▶ Weak nouns/adjectives have simplified inflection, thus have to be analyzed using their modifiers.

Gemyndig ic beo naman þines.

On naman þinum gehæl me.

On ðone hāran stan.

Towards the grey rock.

Weak Versus Strong

Old English nouns and adjectives:

- ▶ Strong nouns/adjectives typically convey more precise grammatical information.

stān, stān, stānes, stāne

stānas, stānas, stāna, stānum

til, tilne, tiles, tilum

tile, tile, tilra, tilum

- ▶ Weak nouns/adjectives have simplified inflection, thus have to be analyzed using their modifiers.

nama, naman, naman, naman

naman, naman, namena, namum

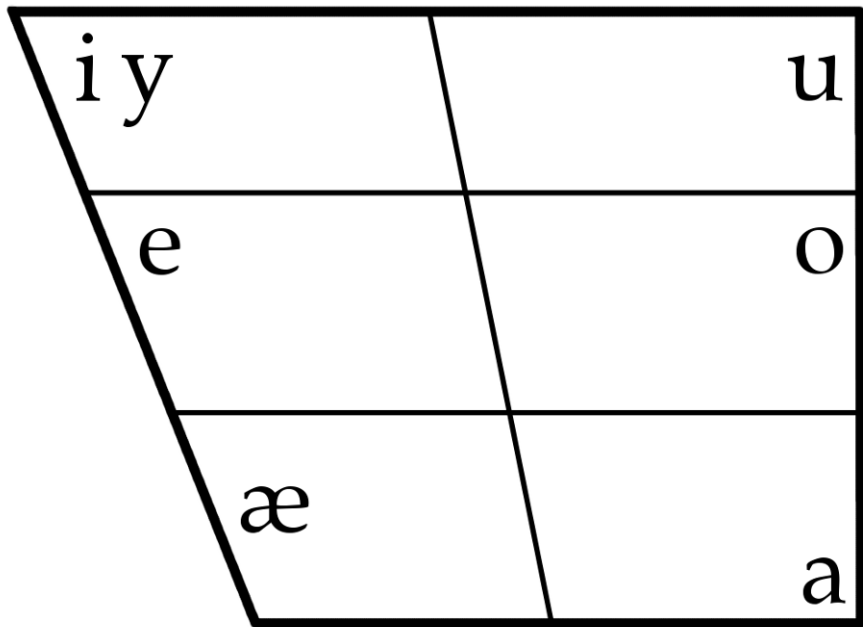
til, tilan, tilan, tilan

tilan, tilan, tilra, tilum

Strong Nouns: Masculine and Neuter

m	singular	plural	singular	plural
Nom.	stān	stānas	dæg	dagas
Acc.	stān	stānas	dæg	dagas
Gen.	stānes	stāna	dæges	daga
Dat.	stāne	stānum	dæge	dagum

n	singular	plural	singular	plural
Nom.	word	word	scip	scipu
Acc.	word	word	scip	scipu
Gen.	wordes	worda	scipes	scipa
Dat.	worde	wordum	scipe	scipum



Length

	short	long
<i>vowel</i>	man, mann, ford, dweorh	mān, fōr, dēor
<i>coda</i>	man, hǣs, fōr, dēor	hǣst, ford, mann, dweorh
<i>syllable</i>	man, feoh	mann, mān, hǣst, fōr, ford, dweorh, dēor
<i>stem</i>	man, werod, fugol, cyning	mann, mān, hǣst, engel, īsern, hēafod, tungol

Length

- ▶ A syllable (stem) is long if either its vowel or its coda is;
- ▶ Like all vowels, diphthongs (and digraphs) can be long or short.

Thus a stem containing a long vowel is always long:

- ▶ *long*: gār, gāst, tīd, sōð, fȳr, spræc, ēa, fēond, hālga

A stem containing a short vowel is short unless followed by more than one consonant:

- ▶ *short*: man, wer, dæg, feoh, hige, bana, guma
- ▶ *long*: mann, grund, healf, weorð, gefeoht

The length of a simplex dissyllable stem with initial stress is determined from the length of its initial syllable; thus *werod* is short, *hēafod* long.

So?

The relevance for *dæg* is that short syllables with vowels corresponding to Proto-Germanic *a* will have fronted to *æ* in the singular but retained *a* in the plural (because they were here followed by a back vowel): *dæg*, *dagas*.

The relevance for *scipu* is that short neuter stems retain the old neuter plural *-u* (hence *scipu*) whereas long stems drop it (hence *word*).

Strong Nouns: Feminine

f	singular	plural	singular	plural
Nom.	lār	lāra	giefu	giefa
Acc.	lāre	lāra	giefe	giefa
Gen.	lāre	lāra	giefe	giefa
Dat.	lāre	lārum	giefe	giefum

Weak Nouns

m/n	singular	plural	singular	plural
Nom.	nama	naman	ēage	ēagan
Acc.	naman	naman	ēage	ēagan
Gen.	naman	namena	ēagan	ēagena
Dat.	naman	namum	ēagan	ēagum

Example Sentences

Strong masculine *a*-stem noun: *stān*

Se stan is ormætlice micel.

Hwilc fæder wile syllan his cyldre stan?

Stephanus wæs stanum worpod.

Stanes gecynd is heard.

Hi druncon of ðam gastlican stane, and se stan wæs Crist.

Hi ne forlætað on þe stan ofer stane.

Heora mulas þa mihton gan sona, þe ær stodon astifode on stana gelicnysse.

Weak masculine noun: *nama*

Adam him eallum naman gesceop.

Ða sette Adam eft hire oðerne naman: Aeua.

On minum naman hi adræfað deoflu.

Hys nama wæs Symeon.

Germanic Noun Classes

class	stem	gender	PG	OE	oblique cases	plural
1	a	m	*stainaz	stān	stān, stānes, stāne	stānas
1	a	m	*dagaz	dæg	dæg, dæges, dæge	dagas
1	a	n	*skipa ⁿ	scip	scip, scipes, scipe	scipu
1	ja	m	*andijaz	ende	ende, endes, ende	endas
1	ja	n	*kunja ⁿ	cynn	cynn, cynnes, cynne	cynn
1	wa	m(/f)	*saiwiz	sā	sā, sāes, sā	sās
1	wa	n	*melwą	melu	melu, melwes, melwe	melu
2	ō	f	*giftiz	giefu	giefe, giefe, giefe	giefa
2	jō	f	*agjō	ecg	ecge, ecge, ecge	ecga
2	wō	f	*badwō	beadu	beadwe, beadwe, beadwe	beadwa
3	i	m	*winiz	wine	wine, wines, wine	wine
3	i	f	*naudiz	nīed	nīed, nīede, nīede	nīeda
3	i	n	*speru	spere	spere, speres, spere	speru
4	u	m	*felþuz	feld	feld, felda, felda	felda
4	u	f	*handuz	hand	hand, handa, handa	handa

Germanic Noun Classes

class	stem	gender	PG	OE	oblique cases
5	cons.	m	*fōts	fōt	fōt, fōtes, fēt
5	cons.	f	*bōks	bōc	bōc, bēc, bēc
6	r	m	*fadēr	fæder	fæder, fæder/fæderes, fæder/fædere
6	r	f	*mōdēr	mōdor	mōdor, mōdor/mēder, mēder
7	nd	m	*frijōndz	frēond	frēond, frēondes, frīend/frēonde
8	es	n	*kalbiz	cealf	cealf, cealfes, cealfe
9	dental	m	*halip	hæle	hæle, *hæleþ, *hæleþ
wk	an	m	*gumō	guma	guman, guman, guman
wk	an	n	*augan	ēage	ēagan, ēagan, ēagan
wk	ōn	f	*tungō	tunge	tungan, tungan, tunga
wk	īn	f	*hauhi	hīehþu	hīehþu, hīehþu, hīehþu