

# OLD ENGLISH NOUNS



## *Gender*

**The noun in OE had only two grammatical categories proper: number and case. In addition it distinguished 3 genders.**

# Gender

The category of gender was formed by 3 gender-forms: *masculine*, *feminine*, *neuter*.

## *Masculine*

*Male beings*   *Lifeless things*   *Abstract notions*

fæder

hrōf

nama

# Gender

## Feminine

**Female b-s    Lifeless th-s    Abstact  
notions**

*dother            tunze            lufu*

## Neuter

*hors            scip            mōd*

# Gender

Very often OE gender corresponds to natural sex distinction. But sometimes they didn't coincide. For example:

OE **wīf** (wife) is *neuter*

OE **wifman** (woman) is *masculine*

# Quantitative Changes. Shortening

Sometimes a word could be of two genders.

OE **sǣ** - *masculine and neuter*.

If a word had two genders, it could be identified in the text by the demonstrative pronoun or adjective preceding the noun.

**Sēō sǣ** – f; **Sē sǣ** – m.

The correspondence between the meaning of the word and its gender is hard to trace. It caused different approaches to defying gender either as a grammatical or a lexical category.

# *Gender*

- **Some scientists (B.A. Ilyish) consider it a lexico-grammatical category as most of the nouns belong to one gender.**
- **Others (V.D. Arakin) find this category more grammatical than lexical as the gender is not always reflected in the sex distinctions and a noun could belong to two genders.**
- **Some linguists (T.A. Rastorgueva) think it was merely a classifying feature accounting for the division of nouns into morphological classes.**

## *Number*

It consisted of two grammatical forms: the singular and the plural, which were distinguished in all the declensions with very few homonymous forms.

### ***Nominative Singular*** ***Plural***

Fisc (fish)

ēāze (eye)

tōǎ (tooth)

scip (ship)

### ***Nominative***

fiscas

ēāzan

tēǎ

scipu



# Case

The OE noun had 4 cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative.

- The Nominative case is the case of an active agent:

*þā Finnas and þā Beormas spræcon nēah ān ʒepēode (the Finns and the Permians spoke nearly the same language)*

- Nouns in the Genitive case served as attributes to other nouns:

*þāra cyniʒa ʒetruman (the king's armies)*

- The Dative case indicated the means and manner of the action:

*Ōpre naman (by another name)*

- The Accusative case was used with nouns as direct objects denoting the recipient of the action:

*sē here þæt lond ʒeēode (the army conquered the land).*

# Declension

**The total number of declensions exceeded 25. The OE system of declensions was based on a number of features:**

- **the stem suffix;**
- **the gender**
- **the phonetic structure of the word;**
- **phonetic changes in the final syllable**

**The division of all nouns into types of declension in the first place rests upon the most ancient grouping of nouns according to the stem-suffixes.**

# Word Structure

- Originally, in Proto Germanic the word consisted of 3 main parts: **the root, the stem-suffix and the grammatical ending.**
- In Late PG the old stem-suffixes lost their derivational force and merged with other components of the word, usually with endings.
- So, in OE the word consists of two parts: the stem (the root) and the grammatical ending.
- E.g. PG \*fisc-a-z                      -                      Goth. **fisks**

# Word Structure

- In OE grammatical endings were added straight to the root, they had no traces of the stem-suffix as such.

# Types of Declension

- The original stem-suffixes were formed by vowels and by consonants. Thus, there are two principal groups of declension in OE: ***the vowel (strong) and the consonantal (weak) declension.***
- In some cases the new form was constructed by adding the grammatical ending directly to the root. These words formed the so-called root declension.
- ***Thus, it is customary to distinguish 3 types of declension: strong, weak and root-declension.***

# Vowel Declension

- The vowel declension comprises 4 main paradigms: **a-stem**, **ō-stem**, **u-stem**, **i-stem**. It's also called **strong declension**.

## a-stem

- It includes **masculine** and **neuter** nouns only.

### Masculine

Sing.	Pl.
N. stān	stānas
G. stānes	stāna
D. stāne	stānum
A. stān	stānas

### Neuter

Sing.	Pl.
scip	scipu
scipes	scipa
scipe	scipum
scip	scipu

# Weak Declension

## n-stem

- It comprises masculine, feminine and neuter nouns.

<i>Masc.</i>		<i>Fem.</i>		<i>Neuter</i>	
Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
N. nama	naman	cwene	cwenan	ēāre	ēāran
G. naman	namena	cwenan	cwenena	ēāran	ēārena
D. naman	namum	cwenan	cwenum	ēāran	ēārum
A. naman	naman	cwenan	cwenan	ēāre	ēāran

# Root Declension

- The root declension includes masculine, feminine and neuter nouns.

## Masculine

Sg.	Pl.
N.mann	m <u>e</u> nn
G.mannes	manna
D.m <u>e</u> nn	mannum
A.mann	m <u>e</u> nn

## Feminine

Sg.	Pl.
bōc	bēc
bōc	bōca
bēc	bōcum
bōc	bēc



# Root Declension

- In three cases (Dat.sg; Nom. and Acc.pl.) we see the results of i-mutation, which caused the change in the root vowel making it similar to itself, i.e. more front.
- The original form of the Dat.sg. must have been *manni*, *bōci*. The ending *i* was attached to the root causing mutation and then disappeared.
- Consequences of this change are left in the present time: *man* – *men*; *foot* – *feet*, *goose* – *geese*.