

# OLD ENGLISH NOUN

*Grammatical Categories*

*Declensions*

# The Noun Grammatical Categories

- The OE noun had two numbers, singular and plural; three genders: masculine (M), feminine (F) and neuter (N); and four cases: nominative, genitive, dative and accusative.

# Declensions

- The OE system of declensions was based on a number of distinctions: the *stem-suffix*, the *gender of nouns*, the phonetic structure of the word, phonetic changes in the final syllables.
- Cf. (compare): To define the type of declension of a Russian noun we are to know its *gender* and its *ending*. (К первому склонению относятся существительные женского и мужского рода с окончанием - а, -я).

In ancient times nouns were classified according to their meaning. Nouns denoting objects of the same kind formed a special group with their own stem-forming suffix. But later the principle of the original classification was lost.

# Stem-forming Suffix

The stem-forming suffix in OE had ceased to be a distinct component part of the noun. Though the types of nouns as **a**-stems, **ō**-stems, **n**-stems, etc. were distinguished, there was little in the OE forms themselves to show any traces of these stems.

## Traces of stem-forming suffixes in OE

The stem-forming suffix had merged together either with the root or with the ending, or had become an inflection itself. As a grammatical ending it had survived only in a few types of declension: **n**-stems had many forms ending in *-an*, **u**-stems had the inflection *-u* in some cases [Rastorgueva, 2001].

# Vocalic Declensions

*Vocalic stems* are  
a-stems, ja-, wa-stems (MN);  
ō -stems, jō-, wōstems (F);  
i-stems (MNF);  
u-stems (MF).

These are *strong declensions*.

# Typical paradigms of the strong masculine (a-) declension

## Singular

Nom. Acc.	stān	dæg	fiscere
Gen.	stā <u>nes</u>	dæg <u>es</u>	fisc <u>eres</u>
Dat.	stāne	dæge	fiscere

## Plural

Nom. Acc.	stā <u>nas</u>	dæg <u>as</u>	fisc <u>eras</u>
Gen.	stān <u>a</u>	dæg <u>a</u>	fisc <u>era</u>
Dat.	stān <u>um</u>	dæg <u>um</u>	fisc <u>erum</u>



# Productive declension

About *one third of OE nouns* were Masculine **a-stem**. More and more nouns which originally belonged to other stems or were borrowed from other languages joined this declension.

The inflections of the Dative plural **-um** and Genitive plural **-a** were alike in all declensions.

# masculine (a-) declension

- It was characteristic of OE nouns to have *homonymous* forms for the *Nominative and Accusative plural*.
- The Mod E plural marker **-(e)s** goes back to the OE **-as** in *the Nominative and Accusative plural forms of Masculine a-stems*. This inflection began to be added to the other Masculine stems towards the end of the OE period.
- The OE *Genitive singular ending -es* of a-stems was a prototype of the *Mod E Possessive Case marker -'s*. In OE it began to spread to other Masculine and Neuter stems, but its use was limited to the singular nouns [Smirnitsky, 1998].

# Typical paradigms of the strong neuter (a-) declension

## Singular

Nom.	Acc.	scip	word	scēāp
Gen.		scip <u>es</u>	word <u>es</u>	scēāp <u>es</u>
Dat.		scipe	worde	scēāpe

## Plural

Nom.	Acc.	scipu	word	scēāp
Gen.		scipa	worda	scēāpa
Dat.		scipum	wordum	scēāpum

# Notes:

1. Neuter a-stems differed from the masculine a-stems in the plural of the Nom. and Acc. cases. Instead of *-as* they usually took *-u* for short stems, i.e. nouns with a short root-syllable, and did not add any inflection in the long-stemmed variant.
2. The homonymy of long-stemmed Neuters in the singular and plural resulted in identical singular and plural forms of some Mod E nouns: sheep (OE *sceāp*), deer (OE *deōr*), swine (OE *swīn*). Many of these words are the names of animals.

**ja-stems** and **wa-stems** differed from pure **a-stems** in some forms, as their endings contained traces of the elements **-j-** and **-w-**.

### Singular

Nom. Acc.	here (M)	wīte (N)	cneo(w)
Gen.	heriges	wītes	cneowes
Dat.	herige	wīte	cneowe

### Plural

Nom. Acc.	herige <b>as</b>	wīt(i)u	cneo(w)
Gen.	herige <b>a</b>	wīt(e) <b>a</b>	cneow <b>a</b>
Dat.	herig <b>um</b>	wīt(i) <b>um</b>	cneow <b>um</b>

# Typical paradigms of the strong feminine (ō-) declension

## Singular

Nom.	talu	lār	sāwol
Gen.	tale	lāre	sāwle
Dat.	tale	lāre	sāwle
Acc.	tale	lāre	sāwle

## Plural

Nom.	tala, -e	lāra, -e	sāwola, -e
Gen.	tala	lāra	sāwla
Dat.	talum	lārum	sāwlum
Acc.	tala, -e	lāra, -e	sāwola, -e

# Notes:

1. ***Talu*** is a noun with a *short root vowel*; ***lār*** is a noun with a *long vowel*.
2. In ***sāwol*** the unstressed vowel is omitted in the oblique cases.

***ō-stems*** were all feminine. Practically no word of this type ends in ***-ō***, which was lost or transformed. The paradigm of ***ō-stems*** contains many *homonymous* forms.

# jō- stems and wō-stems:

are declined like pure ō-stems except that *-j-* and *-w-* appeared in some endings.

## Singular

Nom.	ecg	sceadu
Gen.	ecge	sceadwe
Dat.	ecge	sceadwe
Acc.	ecge	sceadwe

## Plural

Nom.	ecga	sceadwa
Gen.	ecga	sceadwa
Dat.	ecgum	sceadwum
Acc.	ecga	sceadwa



# i-stem, u-stem

## Singular

- Nom. mete (i-, *M*) dāēd (i-, *F*) sunu (u-, *M*) hond (u-, *F*)
- Gen. metes dāēd, -e suna honda
- Dat. mete dāēde suna honda
- Acc. mete dāēde sunu honda

## Plural

- Nom. meta, **-as** dāēde, -a suna honda
- Gen. meta**a** dāēda**a** suna**a** honda**a**
- Dat. met**um** dāēd**um** sun**um** hond**um**
- Acc. meta dāēde, -a suna honda

# Notes:

1. Division into genders break up **i**-stems into **3** declensions, but is irrelevant for **u**-stems: *masc.* and *fem.* **u**-stems decline alike.

2. The *length of the root-syllable* is important for both stems: **mete** (i-, *short-stemmed*), **sunu** (u-, *short-stemmed*), **fēld** (u-, *long-stemmed*).

## Strong and Weak Declensions

The strong declension includes **nouns** (or substantives) with vocalic stems /-**a**, -**ō**, -**i**, -**u** / and the weak declension comprises **n-stems** only.

# The weak or n-declension includes:

- 1) masculine nouns ending in Nom. sg. in **-a**, e.g. **nama** (ModE name), **guma** (man), **hunta** (hunter), **tima** (time), **wita** (councillor), etc.
- 2) all feminine nouns ending in **-e**, e.g. **hlæfdige** (lady), **tunge** (tongue), **sunne** (sun), etc.
- 3) two neuter nouns ending in **-e**: **ēāge** (eye) and **ēāre** (ear).

# n-declension

## Singular

Nom.	huntā ( <i>Masc.</i> )	tunge ( <i>Fem.</i> )	ēāre ( <i>Neut.</i> )
Gen.	huntan	tungan	ēāran
Dat.	huntan	tungan	ēāran
Acc.	huntan	tungan	ēāran

## Plural

Nom.	huntan	tungan	ēāran
Gen.	huntena	tungena	ēārena
Dat.	huntum	tungum	ēārum
Acc.	huntan	tungan	ēāran

# The most numerous group of consonantal stems

**n-stems** were the most numerous group of consonantal stems. They had only *two distinct forms in the singular*: one form for the Nom. case and the other for oblique cases. In fact, **n-stems** had begun to lose their declensional system.

Masculine **n-stems** often denoted a doer of the action (*nomina agentis*), e.g. *hunta* (a hunter), *dēma* (a judge), *bylda* (a builder), *cræfta* (craftsman), etc [Smirnitsky, 1998].

The only relics of **n**-stems in Mod E are *oxen* (OE *oxan*), *brethren* and *children*, although the latter was an original **s**-stem and only later converted to the **n**-stem paradigm. The **n**-stem inflection was added to the OE word *cildru* (s-stem), when the former plural marker failed to distinguish the plural form. **n**-stems correspond to the Russian nouns *семья, время, знамя, племя*, etc [Ylysh, 1973].

# (r-) declension

**r** – declension included a small number of masculine and feminine nouns *denoting kinship*.

*Instability* was characteristic of this declension [Smirnitsky, 1998]. Every word of this group had some peculiarities in its paradigm. Some nouns had a *mutated vowel in the Dative singular* (*brēþer, dehter*), others *dropped the second vowel* in some forms (*brōþrum, mōdra*) or *employed some endings of other stems* (*fæderas* - Nom., Acc. pl. Cf. *-as* in **a**-stems) [Rastorgueva, 2001].

**r**-stems correspond to the Russian nouns *мать, дочь* [Ylysh, 1973]. The original suffix **-r** can be found in the forms of oblique cases: *матери, дочери*, etc.



# R-stem Paradigm

## Singular

Nom.	brōþor	fæder	mōdor	dohtor
Gen.	brōþor	fæder, <b>-es</b>	mōdor	dohtor
Dat.	brēþer	fæder	mēder	dehter
Acc.	brōþor	fæder	mōdor	dohtor

## Plural

Nom.	brōþor	fæder <b>as</b>	mōdra , -u	dohtor, -tra
Gen.	brōþra	fædera	mōdra	dohtra
Dat.	brōþr <b>um</b>	fæder <b>um</b>	mōdr <b>um</b>	dohtr <b>um</b>
Acc.	brōþor	fæder <b>as</b>	mōdra , -u	dohtor, -tra

# (s-) declension

To this declension there belonged neuter nouns denoting young beings, baby animals: cild (child), cealf (calf), lamb (lamb), ez (egg), etc [Ivanova, 2001]. The *stem-suffix* **-s** was transformed into **-r** by *Verner's Law (rhotacism)*.

**es-terms** correspond to the Russian nouns *небо* – *небеса*; *чудо* – *чудеса*. [Ylysh, 1973].

# S-stem Paradigm

## Singular

Nom.	cild	lamb		
Gen.	cildes	lambes	Dat.	cilde
	lambe	Acc.	cild	lamb

## Plural

Nom.	cild, cildru	lambbru
Gen.	cilda, cildra	lambbra
Dat.	cildum, cildrum	lambbrum
Acc.	cild, cildru	lambbru

# (nd-) declension

Masculine stems in **-nd-** are old active (present) participles; some of these show i-umlaut in Dat. sg. and Nom./Acc. pl. Typical examples are *frēond* (ModE. friend), *hettend* (enemy), *hāelend* (saviour), *wealdend* (ruler), *āgend* (owner), etc.

The **(nd)-declension** *combines* the peculiarities of the declension of **a-stems** and, to some extent, **r-stems** as they all denote persons.

# Paradigm

## Singular

Nom., Acc.	frēond	hettend
Gen.	frēond <u>e</u> s	hettend <u>e</u> s
Dat.	frēond, frēonde	hettend, hettende

## Plural

Nom., Acc.	frēond	hettend, -e; -as
Gen.	frēond <u>a</u>	hettend <u>ra</u>
Dat.	frēond <u>um</u>	hettend <u>rum</u>

# Root Consonant Stems

From the historical point of view this declension was made up of monosyllabic consonant stems, i.e. nouns in which the old case endings were added *directly to the final consonant of the root*. Typical examples are man(n), fōt, tōþ, hnutu (nut), āc (oak), gōs (goose), mūs (mouse), burg (fortress, town), cū (cow), niht (night), ēa (water, river), lūs (louse), bōc (book), etc.

The paradigms for these nouns are affected by i-mutation [Mitchell, 2007].

# Root Consonant Stems

The *interchange of root-vowels* typical of this declension has left traces in Mod E. *irregular plural forms* – *men, women, teeth, mice*, etc. [Rastorgueva, 2001]. Most of the OE masculine examples can be recognized by thinking of the Mod E plural of the corresponding word: 'foot' (OE fōt), 'man' (OE mann), 'tooth' (OE tōþ). Most of the feminine nouns have become regular in Mod E: 'book' (OE bōc), 'oak' (OE āc), 'goat' (OE gāt), nut (OE hnutu), night (OE niht); but a few survive: goose (OE gōs), louse (OE lūs), mouse (OE mūs) [Mitchell, 2007].

# Paradigm

Singular	Masculine		Feminine	
Nom., Acc.	mann	fōt	bōc	mūs
Gen.	mann <u>e</u> s	fōt <u>e</u> s	bēc, bōca	mūs, mūse
Dat.	menn	fēt	bēc	mūs

## Plural

Nom., Acc.	menn	fēt	bēc	mūs
Gen.	man <u>n</u> a	fōt <u>a</u>	bōca	mūsa
Dat.	mann <u>um</u>	fōt <u>um</u>	bōc <u>um</u>	mūs <u>um</u>

**Note:** The masculines have adopted the **a**-stem form of Gen., sg.; the feminines most often have an **ō**-stem Gen. in **-e** (bec/bōce).