

# 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.	stān <u>es</u>	dæg <u>es</u>	fiscer <u>es</u>
Dat.	stāne	dæge	fiscere

## Plural

Nom. Acc.	stān <u>as</u>	dæg <u>as</u>	fiscer <u>as</u>
Gen.	stān <u>a</u>	dæg <u>a</u>	fiscer <u>a</u>
Dat.	stān <u>um</u>	dæg <u>um</u>	fiscer <u>um</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 *Genetive 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.		scipes	wordes	scēāpes
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-, <i>M</i> )	dāēd (i-, <i>F</i> )	sunu (u-, <i>M</i> )	hond (u-, <i>F</i> )
■	Gen.	metes	dāēd, -e	sunā	hondā
■	Dat.	mete	dāēde	sunā	hondā
■	Acc.	mete	dāēde	sunu	hondā

## Plural

■	Nom.	meta, - <b>as</b>	dāēde, -a	sunā	hondā
■	Gen.	meta <b>a</b>	dāēda <b>a</b>	sunā <b>a</b>	hondā <b>a</b>
■	Dat.	met <b>um</b>	dāēd <b>um</b>	sun <b>um</b>	hond <b>um</b>
■	Acc.	meta	dāēde, -a	sunā	hondā

# 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.	hunta ( <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	ēārūm
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* (*brēper, dehter*), others *dropped the second vowel* in some forms (*brōprum, 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, доче<sup>ри</sup>*, etc.



# R-stem Paradigm

## Singular

Nom.	brōpor	fæder	mōdor	dohtor
Gen.	brōpor	fæder, -es	mōdor	dohtor
Dat.	brēper	fæder	mēder	dehter
Acc.	brōpor	fæder	mōdor	dohtor

## Plural

Nom.	brōpor	fæderas	mōdra , -u	dohtor, -tra
Gen.	brōpra	fædera	mōdra	dohtra
Dat.	brōprum	fæderum	mōdrum	dohtrum
Acc.	brōpor	fæderas	mōdra , -u	dohtor, -tra

# (s-) declension

To this declension there belonged neuter nouns denoting young beings, baby animals: cild (child), cealf (calf), lamb (lamb), e3 (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* – *небе**с**а*; *чудо* – *чуде**с**а*. [Ylysh, 1973].

# S-stem Paradigm

## Singular

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

## Plural

Nom.	cild, cildru	lambru
Gen.	cilda, cildra	lambra
Dat.	cildum, cildrum	lambrum
Acc.	cild, cildru	lambru

# (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>es</u>	hettend <u>es</u>
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 mȳs, mūse
Dat.	menn	fēt bēc	mȳs

		Plural	
Nom., Acc.	menn	fēt	bēc mȳs
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> mūsum

**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).