

Warsaw Studies in English Language and Literature

Edited by Jacek Fisiak

Studies in Old and Middle English

Jacek Fisiak (ed.)



SWSPiZ
Łódź – Warszawa

PETER LANG
Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

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The English-Saxon morphological interface: Evidence from the nominal inflection of the West Saxon and Old Saxon *Genesis*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates the shape of the early Germanic nominal system as attested in two representatives of the Ingvaemonic *Sprachbund*: Old English and Old Saxon. The focus of the study is on the *interparadigmatic* developments which engendered the later large-scale reorganisation of the inherited inflection in individual Germanic languages. The restructuring process entailed a gradual transition of nouns from the minor (unproductive) declensional types to the major (productive) paradigms and their concomitant fluctuation between the inherited and innovative paradigmatic patterns. As a result, the analogical formations on the template set by the productive masculine *a*-stem declension are frequently to be found in the paradigms of minor inflectional types (such as *i*-stems, *u*-stems, *r*-stems, *s*-stems (< **es/-os*) or *nd*-stems), where the inherited inflectional endings tended to be steadily ousted by the expansive genitive sg. *-es*, *-as*, and nominative/accusative pl. *-as*, *-os* markers. Although the process of a gradual rearrangement of the nominal inflection affected both investigated languages, proceeding essentially along the same lines of development, its dating, extent, tempo and precise conditioning may have varied, which is best reflected in the largely divergent makeup of present-day English and German nominal inflection. Since the filiation of Old English with Old Saxon can be most straightforwardly observed in the two parallel texts of *Genesis*: the West-Saxon *Genesis B* (10th/11th c.) and its Old Saxon original (9th c.), it is these two texts that were chosen to be used as the primary sources for the present quantitative and qualitative analysis. Not only does an investigation into such parallel fragments offer a unique opportunity to compare the inflectional systems of Old English and Old Saxon (exploring even minute details), but also, within a broader perspective, it enables one to appreciate the affinity between the two dialects of the Ingvaemonic subgroup of Germanic.

Keywords: Old English; Old Saxon; *Genesis*; inflectional morphology; productive/unproductive declensional types; interparadigmatic restructuring; analogical pressure

1. Preliminary remarks

Old English and Old Saxon, as representatives of the Ingvaeanic subbranch of West Germanic, share a number of phonological, morphological and lexical features, stemming, to an extent, from their long-standing, immediate cultural and linguistic contact. Along with Old Frisian, i.e. the third of the three Ingvaeanic dialects, they constituted no more than a “loosely knit linguistic community within West Germanic” (Nielsen 1989: 78), exhibiting both common inherited traits as well as independently developed innovations and retentions. The features considered criterial for such a classification of these early Germanic dialects comprise, among others, the loss of a nasal before a fricative with compensatory lengthening of the vowel (*Ingvaeanic nasal spirant rule*), monophthongisation of PGmc. **ai* > ē/ā, the presence of -*Vs* (-*as*, -*os*) ending in the masculine *a*-stems, the absence of a proper reflexive pronoun (the accusative of the third person pronoun employed instead), syncretism of the dative and accusative in first and second person pronouns, the loss of -*r* in the form of the nominative singular of the masculine pronoun, or uniform verbal desinences in the plural (Markey 1981: 37; Robinson 1992: 250-251). At least three of these features can be viewed as definitive evidence for the formation of an Ingvaeanic speech community as “a separate, distinctive dialectal area along the North Sea coast before the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain was begun in c. 450” (Markey 1981: 38).¹ Some of these shared qualities, such as the merger of the dative and accusative cases, signal an accruing degeneration of the inflectional structure of the North Sea Germanic dialects. The ensuing gradual deflexion is evident in the nominal, adjectival and verbal systems, and is a feature which all Germanic languages continued to experience in the course of their subsequent development.

The present paper focuses on the shape of the nominal systems in Old English and Old Saxon, exploring in particular the effects of the sweeping analogical processes which, having largely affected the nominal paradigms, led to their gradual rearrangement in the two languages. The material offered by the two investigated dialects evinces a striking instability of the original minor inflectional types, which under increasing analogical pressure tended to subdue to the impact of the productive inflection. The process is, in fact, a broader Germanic tendency, discernible in all the minor inflectional types. As observed by Kastovsky (1997), Lass (1997) or Krygier (2002) with reference to the Old Eng-

1 The Ingvaeanic character of Old Saxon has been disputed and occasionally questioned, due to the presence of many non-Ingvaeanic features which can be attributed to a large-scale Franconian impact, evident particularly in the spelling and morphology of all texts except the Straubing manuscript of *Hēliand* (cf. Cathey 2002: 23; for bibliographical details see Nielsen 1989: 100, 103-4; Krogh 1996).

lish state of affairs, the process of the gradual disintegration of the nominal inflection in Old English began relatively early and involved all minor declensional types. Likewise, none of the Old Saxon minor paradigms was totally free from the pressure of the innovative paradigmatic patterns. Granted the tight genetic connection between the two languages, a considerable degree of similarity with regard to the pattern of the restructuring process might be expected.

The present investigation is concerned with capturing the most conspicuous regularities in the two related languages with respect to the dissemination of the innovative inflection, but also with uncovering patterned variations and subtle details, along with an attempt at accounting for them. Importantly, given the scope of the material to be analysed, in the case of Old English the study will shed light on the process of the restructuring of the declensional system in its relatively early stage, i.e. in Early West Saxon.

2. The pattern of the restructuring process in Germanic: General tendencies

The gradual transfer of nouns classified traditionally as minor to the major productive type of inflection can be observed in all Germanic languages.² An explicit reference to the changing condition of the early Germanic inflectional system can be found, among others, in Meillet (2005: 94) who, in his rather prefatory treatment of early Germanic nominal inflection, states:

(...) in common Germanic the variety of Indo-European [declensional] types still existed almost in its entirety. Nevertheless, from the time of the most ancient texts, the dialects tended to restrict this variety. The ancient texts still show many traces, which the alternation of finals rapidly effaced. By the time of the Middle Ages, we find that inflections either become unified or they disappear.

(Meillet 2005: 94)

The resulting state of affairs, attested in the early Germanic written sources, is a direct consequence of an interplay of phonological and morphological factors which radically changed the profile of the declensional system inherited from Proto-Indo-European. Morphological remodelling of the nominal inflectional system entailed transfers to the two major vocalic declensional types, namely to the masculine *a*-stem (< PIE **o*-stems) and feminine *ā*-stem (< PIE **ā*-stems) declensions. Another declensional type, potentially attractive to the minor unproductive paradigms, was the weak inflectional pattern (original *n*-stems), which at this early stage tended to be productive, both in Old English and Old Saxon. A corollary of these interparadigmatic transferrals is the emergence of synchronic alter-

2 For a brief comparative overview of the minor paradigms in early Germanic languages, see Krahe (1969: 25-50); Prokosch (1939: 245-259); Ramat (1981).

nations between the archaic and innovative inflection, only to be expected in the attested material. At the same time, it must be noted that since some of the inter-paradigmatic shifts had taken place relatively early, i.e. before the first written attestations, the synchronic alternation is wanting in many nouns.

An early transfer to the productive inflectional types can certainly be postulated for Old English nouns of the type *hyldo* (*hyldu*) ‘homage’, *hæto* (*hætu*) ‘heat’, *þyðstro* (*þeostru*) ‘darkness’, *gebyrdo* ‘birth’ or *wiðermēdo* ‘hostility’, classified formally as feminine *ō*-stems (frequently used as indeclinable forms), which originated as deadjectival abstract nouns of the *īn*-declension. The type is still retained as an independent inflectional class in Gothic (e.g., *managei* ‘multitude’, acc. sg. *managein*, where *-īn* > *-i* > *-e* in the genitive, dative, accusative sg. and the nominative, accusative pl.) and in Old High German (e.g., *hōhi* ‘height’ with a variant *hōhin*) (Braune – Heidermanns 2004: 105-106; Braune – Reiffenstein 2004: 211; cf. footnote 7). Due to an early merger of these stems with the declension in *-ipō*, a new form of the nominative sg. emerged, surfacing with *-u* (later *-o*), and frequently extended to the oblique cases of the singular as well as to the nominative and accusative pl. (Wright – Wright 1908: 193; Campbell 1959: 236-7).

Likewise, a number of historical *u*-stems had entirely shifted to other declensional types (mainly masculine and neuter *a*-stems in Old English, occasionally to *i*-stems in Old Saxon) in the pre-historic stage as they are never to be found with vestiges of the *u*-inflection in the attested Old English or Old Saxon material. These early transfers involved the following substantives: OE *ār*, OS **ēr* ‘messenger’, OE *dēað*, OS **dōth* ‘death’, OE *scield* (*sceld*) ‘shield’, OE *ðorn*, OS *thorn* ‘thorn’, OE, OS *hungor* ‘hunger’, deverbal nominal formations in *-(n)oð*, *-(n)að* as well as OE *sceadu* ‘shadow’, attested as a *-wa-* stem (< PGmc. **skadwa-*, **skapwa-*, gen. sg. *scead(u)we*, alongside neuter *scead*), OS **skado* (Brunner 1965: 229; Köbler 2000: s.v. *skado*). The list can be potentially expanded to include also: OE *bōh*, OS *bōg* ‘bough, arm’, OE *feoh*, OS *fehu* ‘money’, OE *cwidu* ‘cud, quid’, OE, OS *grund* ‘ground, foundation’, OE *cwib(a)* ‘womb’ (declined also as a weak masculine noun), OE *lip*, OS *lid* ‘limb’, OE *wāg* ‘wall’, OE *cinn* ‘chin’, OE *weber* ‘ram, wether’, OS *werd* ‘landlord’, and the *-*tu*-stems: OE, OS *lust* ‘desire, pleasure’, OE *burst*, OS *thurst* ‘thirst’ (Bammesberger 1990: 155-160; Braune – Heidermanns 2004: 101). It is primarily the evidence from Gothic which directly testifies to the *u*-stem lineage of these nouns.

A very early shift has also been postulated for a number of masculine nouns formally assigned to *i*-stems, which originated in *-*es/-os-* stems, e.g., *bere* ‘barley’, *ege* ‘terror’, *hete* ‘hate’, *sele* ‘hall’, and *sege* ‘victory’. Again, their original class affiliation is confirmed by cognate forms found in the Gothic material (*agis*, **baris* (*barizeins*), *hatis*, *sigis*) (Braune – Heidermanns 2004: 108; Campbell 1959: 244).

The decay of the elaborated declensional system inherited from Proto-Germanic involved a number of reshufflings in the Old English and Old Saxon minor paradigms, which brought about an array of synchronic alternations in the attested material. These potential realignments are presented in Tables 1 and 2, for Old English and Old Saxon, respectively. It must be noticed that not absolutely all the potential interparadigmatic realignments are enumerated, but essentially those most frequently encountered in the Old English and Old Saxon material.

Given the confines of the present study, specifically the limitation of the analysis to one text, not all the realignments adduced in the above tables can be expected to be found in the analysed material. It is hoped, however, that the investigation of parallel texts attested relatively early in the two closely related Ingvaonic dialects will afford a valuable insight into the process of restructuring in its earliest stage of operation. Before the findings of the analysis are presented, the composite nature of the Old Saxon idiom, including the vagaries of its orthography, deserves mention. A characteristic facet of the Old Saxon language is certainly its substantial heterogeneity, evident in the fusion of its shared features with Old Frisian, Old English and Old High German, which ensued directly from its geographical location (Rauch 1992: 108). This heterogenous nature of Old Saxon has been explicitly referred to by Klein (2000: 7) who states:

Bei allen Unterschieden im einzelnen besteht bisher Übereinstimmung darin, dass das Profil des uns überlieferten As. nicht durch spezifisch sächs. Besonderheiten und Neuerungen, sondern durch eine Verbindung nördlicher, ingwäonischer und südlicher, zum Ahd. stimmender Züge gekennzeichnet sei.

(Klein 2000: 7)