

ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY CONTENT AND ITS CHANGES IN DIACHRONY

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Abstract: This article is dedicated to the English morphology content and its changes in diachrony: in the Old English and Middle English periods. The morphology of parts of speech such as: noun, verb, adjective, numeral will be considered. They will be analyzed in terms of meaning, form, and function and their changes in the period of transition of the English language from the inflectional (synthetic) to the analytical type. Comparisons of the results obtained from these two periods contribute to a deeper understanding of these topics in synchrony.

Key words: morphology, Old English period, Middle English period, grammatical changes, language evolution, nominative parts of speech.

Before conducting a comparative analysis of Old English period morphology in the Middle English period, it is essential to define the term «morphology».

The first scholar to introduce this originally biological term into linguistics was the German linguist August Schleicher, during the period of active development of comparative-historical linguistics, when scholars began studying the origins of languages, changes in their structure and patterns of development.

Various scholars' opinions on morphology have been analyzed. According to B. A. Ilyish, «Morphology is the part of grammar which treats of the forms of words.» [1]

Academician V. V. Vinogradov defined morphology as «The teaching about the grammatical structure of words, about the forms of words and about the formation of words»[2].

The definition provided by the founder of structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure states: «Morphology is a branch of grammar that deals with various categories of words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, etc.) and various forms of inflection.» [3]

By analyzing definitions from different linguists, both Soviet and foreign, it is possible to identify common elements and derive the following definition:

Morphology is a fundamental branch of linguistics/grammar that examines words, from the point of internal structures, meanings, forms within a language.

Examining the formation of grammatical categories allows for tracing the historical changes in specific parts of speech. The American linguist Leonard Bloomfield describes this function as follows: «Morphological elements serve as linguistic fossils that preserve the history and cultural evolution of a language over time.» [4]

The analysis of morphological changes provides insight into the evolution of a language and illustrates how it has changed under the influence of various internal and external factors.

The Old English period is classified as an inflectional language. This means that grammatical meanings were expressed through a system of flexions rather than analytic structure. Old English possessed a highly developed morphological system, in which the primary parts of speech nouns, verbs, adjectives, and numerals, had complex paradigms of declensions and conjugations.

For instance, nouns were inflected not only for *gender and number* but also had four *cases*. In addition to these categories, nouns were classified into strong and weak declensions.

I. NOUNS:

1a) Gender in Old English nouns always had morphological meaning, it did not depend on the word's meaning and was a fixed feature. For instance, the following words belonged to

the masculine gender: *mann* «man», *fæder* «father», *sunu* «son». The following words were classified as feminine: *mōdor* «mother», *dohtor* «daughter», *cwēn* «queen». The following words were categorized as neuter: *rice* «kingdom», *dēor* «animal», *cild* «baby». As noted in the article by E. M. Popkova, it was difficult to determine the gender of nouns, because morphological signs did not give clear indications of gender and this classification has not reached our days, but analyzing the written monuments and dictionaries that have reached modern times, we can identify the following groups of concepts, the relationship of a word with a particular gender. The masculine gender was more often attributed to words related to: war and/or hunting, trade and management, the concept of strength, power and fear, the water element. The feminine gender was more often considered to be words that related to nature, which most likely had the image of mother nature. The neuter gender includes words that are used to name baby animals and children.[5]

1b). Old English had four cases: the nominative, which marked the subject of a sentence; the genitive, which expressed the possession or relation; the dative, which indicated the indirect object; the accusative, used for direct object. [6]

1c). The classification of nouns into «strong» and «weak» declensions depended on their stem type. Strong nouns had stems *a-*, *o-*, *u-*, *i-*, while weak nouns had stem in *n-*.

1d). Plural forms also varied depending on the declension type. For instance *a-stem* nouns formed the plural with the ending *-as* (*stān* – «stone», *stānas* – «stones»), whereas *n-stem* used the ending *-an* (*nama* – «name», *naman* – «names»).[ibid]

II. VERBS

Verbs, like nouns, were divided into strong and weak. Such a division of verbs was inherent in all Old Germanic languages, but in Old English, this system played a particularly significant role, and it later became the foundation for the formation of the past tense. [7]

Strong verbs formed the past tense through the process of ablaut, which involved altering the root vowel. These verbs were divided into seven classes based on distinct patterns of vowel changes. Weak verbs were divided into only 3 classes and formed the past tense and participle II using suffixes *-d-*, *-t-*. [ibid]

In Old English, the category of voice did not apply to the entire verbal system. It was mainly marked by the contrast between participial forms in transitive constructions. Participle I conveyed an active action «*singende/singing*», while Participle II indicated a passive action and was often used with the verbs *wesan* «be» and *weorðan* «become».

In Old English, aspect categories were represented through perfect and imperfect forms, often using the prefix *ge-* and others (*slēan* «to strike» - *of-slēan* «to kill»). However, as A. I. Smirnitsky notes in *The Old English Language*, prefixes frequently altered the lexical meaning of verbs and were thus more characteristic of word formation than grammatical aspect. The aspect system in Old English was inconsistent since not all verbs could take prefixes.[ibid]

III . ADJECTIVES

Adjectives in Old English had categories of *gender*, *number*, *case*, and *degrees of comparison*, as well as two types of declension: *strong and weak*. The strong and weak declensions of adjectives, although similar in principle to the declensions of nouns, had one key difference. Any adjective could decline in both strong and weak form. As noted by Henry Sweet, «the weak declension was used when adjective was accompanied by a definite article or pronoun, whereas the strong declension was used without such determiners.».[8]

Adjectives had three degrees of comparison: positive (*gōd* – «good»), comparative, formed using a suffix *-ra* (*betera* – «better») and superlative, formed with a suffix (*betst* – «best»).[6]

IV . NUMERALS

Numerals were categorized into cardinal, ordinal, and collective numbers.

A distinctive feature of cardinal numbers from one to three was that they inflected for gender, number and case. For instance, the numeral *ān* «one» had masculine and neuter forms but also had a feminine form *āne*. From *fēower* «four» onward, numerals remained unchanged.

Ordinal numerals were formed with the suffixes *-þa* or *-ta*: *forma* – «first», *ōðer* – «second», *þrida* – «third» [ibid]

Collective numerals were used to denote groups and declined like adjectives. Collective numerals were rarely found in written texts, and were most commonly used with masculine nouns. They designated groups of people and/or objects, being used in special construction

V. ARTICLES.

Modern articles, in their current form, did not exist in Old English but began to emerge during this period. This development resulted from the gradual weakening of demonstrative pronouns, which eventually transitioned into articles. The indefinite article was absent in Old English, while the definite article in late Old English was represented by the pronoun *se*, which varied according to gender.

The middle English period was characterized by significant morphological changes influenced by both internal linguistic processes and external factors, such as the Norman Conquest in 1066. The most profound change was the substantial loss of inflections and the transition to an analytical grammatical system.

The key factors contributing to the transition of the English language to the analytical group include:

1. Phonetic changes - in the Middle English period, the reduction in the number of unstressed vowels led to the loss of many inflectional endings, including case signs, as endings such as *-a*, *-u*, *-e* merged into a single *-e*;
2. the Norman Conquest - as French became the language of the aristocracy, English remained the language of the common people. As a result, native English speakers stopped strictly adhering to grammatical rules; for example, prepositions increasingly replaced case endings;[9]
3. changes in sentence structure - with the loss of inflectional endings, word order has become the main means of denoting grammatical relations, allowing subjects to be distinguished from objects in sentences.

Nouns in Middle English in Middle English underwent considerable simplification.

a) Grammatical gender was gradually lost, and nouns no longer had a clear classification by masculine, feminine, or neuter gender. Pronouns were used to denote gender, rather than the endings of nouns: "he" - for the masculine gender, "she" - for the feminine, and "it" - for neuter nouns [6].

b) As noted by Henry Sweet, «the case system began to decline in the late Old English period, and this process was completed in the Middle English period. The dative and accusative cases lost their endings and their functions were expressed by prepositions»[8].

c) The classification of nouns by type of declension has decreased, and inflectional endings have become more uniform.[6].

d) Plural form in Middle English became more regular, with *-es* emerging as the dominant plural ending (*stone* – *stones*). However, some irregular forms persisted, particularly in commonly used words, such as *men* (from *man*), *mice* (from *mouse*), and *children* (from *child*) [7].

The verbal system also underwent significant changes. The numbers of strong verbs decreased as many transitioned to the weak verb category due to the inefficiency of the ablaut system. B. A. Ilyish explains this shift by noting that the tense formation system among weak verbs was more regular [6].

Additionally, auxiliary verbs began to emerge, leading to the development of more complex tense forms, such as perfect and future tenses. In Old English, the past tense of the Indefinite aspect was expressed with a single form «*ic wrāt*» – «*I wrote*», The construction of the perfect aspect: «*I have written*» appeared.

The passive voice became more developed compared to Old English, primarily due to the increasing use of analytical constructions. The passive was formed with the auxiliary verb *be* + past participle (e.g., *he was taken*), a structure that laid the foundation for the modern English passive voice [ibid].

The aspect system was not as clearly distinguished as in Modern English, but some important developments took place [8]:

1. The progressive aspect (be + present participle) began to emerge, though it was not yet fully grammaticalized. Early examples can be found in texts from the late Middle English period;
2. The perfect aspect (have + past participle) became more widespread and started to function as it does in Modern English.

Adjectives in Middle English lost their *agreement* with nouns and there were no inflections for gender, number, and case. While the Old English gender system was developed: *gōd* (masculine), *gōd* (neuter), *gōde* (feminine), it remained unchanged in Middle English. In general, adjectives lost their inflectional system and became invariable, as in Modern English [6].

In early Middle English, adjectives often took *-e* in the plural (*goode men*), but this marking was later lost.

Middle English retained the Old English suffixes *-er* (comparative) and *-est* (superlative), which remain in Modern English. Some irregular forms from Old English persisted (*good – better – best*) [7].

Numerals lost their system of inflection. The numerals «one», «two», «three» no longer declined by case and gender, making them more similar to their Modern English counterparts. Under the influence of French, ordinal numerals began forming with the suffix *-th*. [6]

Articles in the Middle English period fully developed as a distinct part of speech. Definite article «the» evolved from the Old English «*se*», but lost its gender and case distinctions. Indefinite article «*a/an*» originated from the Old English «*ān*» and became more frequent in denoting new object in speech.[ibid]

CONCLUSION

A comparative analyses of the morphological change of the Old and Middle English periods allow us to trace the evolution of the language:

- the inflectional type in the Old English period was changed in analytical typeIn the Middle English period;
- the Old English language was distinguished by a developed system of endings, including various grammatical categories and declensions, which weakened or completely disappeared in the Middle English period;
- Nouns:Old English nouns had grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter), and also had a developed case system (nominative, genitive, accusative, and dative) and had strong and weak declensions. The development of the language in the Middle English period led to the loss of grammatical gender, as well as reductions in the number of cases. Case relations were now expressed using prepositions, and declensions were no longer divided into strong and weak, becoming more unified;
- Verb System: Old English verbs were divided into strong ones, which were formed using the ablaut, and weak ones, which were formed using the suffixes *-d/-t*. In the Middle English period, this division underwent significant changes and many strong verbs. they have become weak, because weak verbs have a more logical way of forming. Also in the Middle English period, more complex tenses, such as the perfect, began to appear due to the appearance of auxiliary verbs;
- Adjectives:Old English adjectives were consistent with nouns in case, number, and gender, and also had three degrees of comparison. In Middle English, they lost the categories of gender, number, and case and no longer agreed with nouns. Adjectives in the Middle English period also retained the forms of education of comparative and superlative degrees;
- Numerals: Old English numerals *ān(one)*, *twēgen(two)*, *prīe(three)* inflected for gender and number. Ordinal numerals were formed with the suffixes *-þa* or *-ta*. In Middle English, they lost these inflections. Ordinal numerals adopted the French-influenced suffix *-th*;
- Articles: There were no fully formed articles in Old English; the definite article *se*, which was formed only in the late Old English period, declined in gender and case, while the indefinite

article was absent until the Middle English period. In the Middle English language, the definite article became fixed, and *a/an* was formed from *ān*, forming the modern article system.

The processes of change in the morphology of the Middle English period became the basis for the formation of modern *analytical* English. These processes were related not only to internal linguistic factors, but also to external factors, which made the Middle English period an important key in the formation of the language.

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