

Noun in the Old Germanic Languages

Noun in the Old Germanic Languages had two grammatical categories: number and case. In addition, nouns distinguished three genders, but this distinction was not a grammatical category, it was merely a classifying feature accounting, alongside other features, for the division of nouns into morphological classes. The type of Noun Declension has considerably altered from Indo-European to the Proto-Germanic type. Number of cases was reduced, case endings changed. There are four cases in Old Germanic Languages: **Nominative, Genitive, Dative** and **Accusative**.

The most remarkable feature of Old Germanic nouns was their elaborate system of declensions, which was a sort of morphological classification. The total number of declensions, including both the major and minor types, exceeded twenty-five.

Nouns in Old Germanic languages distinguished three types of declension: **STRONG, WEAK** and **MINOR** types.

Strong Declension includes declension of nouns with vocalic stems, namely: **-a-, -ō-, -i-, -u-** stem nouns. Consequently, **strong declension** distinguishes the following types of declension in Old Germanic languages:

a- stems (with **ja-** and **wa-** subtypes);

ō- stems (with **jō-** and **wō-** subtypes);

i- stems

u- stems

Weak Declension comprises only declension of **-n-** stem nouns.

Minor types of declension include small groups of nouns with consonantal stems, namely:

r- stems, s- stems, nt- stems, as well as a group of so-called **root-stem nouns**.

The classification of Old Germanic nouns into **a- stems, ō- stems, etc**, rested upon the ancient Indo-European grouping of nouns according to stem-forming suffixes. Stem-forming suffixes consisted of vowels (a, o, i, etc), or consonants (n, r, etc), or sound sequences (ja, nd). Some nouns had no stem-forming suffixes and therefore were termed root-stem nouns.

Word in Indo-European languages consisted of three morphemes, e.i. it had a three-morpheme structure: **root + stem-forming suffix + ending**. This word-structure is preserved in two cases of the Gothic language, Dative plural and Accusative plural. Above-mentioned can be illustrated by some examples from the Gothic language.

	dags - day	gibo - gift	gasts - guest
	sunus - son		
Dat. pl	dag-a-m	gib-ō-m	gast-i-m
sun-u-m			
Accus. pl	dag-a-ns	gib-ō-ns	gast-i-ns
sun-u-ns			

dag, gib, gast, sun – are roots;

-a-, -ō-, -i-, -u- are stem-forming suffixes;

m and **ns** are case endings respectively.

In Old Germanic languages Indo-European three-morpheme structure was reduced to two: root + ending. The former stem-forming suffix merged either with the root, or the ending, or in some cases it acquired a new grammatical function and developed into a grammatical ending itself (as is the case with the weak declension of nouns in Old Germanic languages).

Former Indo-European stem-forming suffix has left many traces in modern Indo-European languages. Some examples from Russian:

пламя – пламе-**н**-и (n- stem)

племя – племе-**н**-и (n- stem)

чудо – чуде-**с**-а (s- stem)

мать – мате-**п**-и (r- stem)

дочь – доче-**п**-и (r- stem)

etc.

a- stems included Masculine and Neuter nouns. This type of declension was one of the influential declensions in Old Germanic languages, as the majority of Germanic nouns were Masculine a-stems. **ja-** and **wa-** stems differed from pure **a- stems** in some forms, as their endings contained traces of the elements -j- and -w-.

Some examples from the **Gothic** language:

sing	Nom	gasts	ansts (joy,
	Gen	gastis	anstais
	Dat	gasta	anstai
	Acc	gast	anst
pl	Nom	gasteis	ansteis
	Gen	gastē	anstē
	Dat	gastim	anstim
	Acc	gastins	anstins

u- stems comprise Masculine and Feminine nouns.

		Gothic	Old English
sing	Nom	sunus	sunu
	Gen	sunaus	sunā
	Dat	sunau	sunā
	Acc	sunu	sunā
	Nom	sunjus	sunā
	Gen	suniwē	sunā
	Dat	sunum	sunum
	Acc	sununs	sunā

Weak Declension

As mentioned above, nouns with -n- stem-forming suffix were widely spread in different Indo-European languages. Such nouns were numerous in Old Germanic languages as well. Unlike other branches of Indo-European language family, these nouns developed a different paradigm, a different type of declension in Old Germanic languages, where former stem-forming suffix -n- acquired a new grammatical function and grew into a grammatical ending. Thus weak declension is a Germanic innovation, forming a conspicuous common Germanic linguistic feature in the system of nouns.

Gothic		Masc	Fem
		-in- / -an-	-an-
sing	Nom	guma	tuggō
	Gen	gumins	tuggōns
	Dat	gumin	tuggōn
	Acc	guman	tuggōn
pl	Nom	gumans	tuggōns
	Gen	gumanē	tuggōnō
	Dat	gumam	tuggōm
	Acc	gumans	tuggōns

		OHG	Old English
sing	Nom	zunga	tunZe
	Gen	zungûn	tunZan
	Dat	zungûn	tunZan
	Acc	zungûn	tunZan
pl	Nom	zungûn	tunZan
	Gen	zungôno	tunZena
	Dat	zungôm	tunZum
	Acc	zungûn	tunZan

The other consonantal declensions are called **minor consonantal stems**, as they included small groups of nouns. The most important type are **root-stems**, which had never had any stem-forming suffix. Their root vowel in some cases was subjected to phonetic changes: if the grammatical ending contained the sound [i], the vowel fronted by palatal mutation. After the ending was dropped the mutated vowel turned out to be the only marker of the form.