

Adjective in Old Germanic Languages

Adjectives had the same case endings as nouns in Indo-European languages.

e.g. Lat. Masc. bonus hortus “a good garden”

Fem. bona mensa “a good table”

Neut. bonum donum “a good gift”

compare Old Russian - красно солнышко

сыра земля.

Only demonstrative, interrogative and indefinite pronouns, as well as some adjectives in Indo-European had paradigms different from nouns. This type of declension is termed “pronominal” declension. In some Indo-European languages (e.g. Lithuanian), pronominal endings spread to all adjectives, resulting in the development of different case endings of adjectives. Similar tendencies operated in the Old Germanic languages. Adjectives in the Germanic languages developed a system of declension independent of nouns. “Pronominal” declension goes back to the Common Germanic period. “Pronominal” declension of Adjectives is called **strong declension**.

Gothic

		Masc	Neut	Fem
sing	N	blinds	blindata	blinda
	G	blindis	blindis	blindaizos
	D	blindamma	blindamma	blindai
	A	blindana	blind	blinda
pl	N	blindai	blinda	blindōs
	G	blindaizē	blindaizē	blindaizō
	D	blindaim	blindaim	blindaim
	A	blindans	blinda	blindōs

Compare the strong declension of adjectives with the case endings of the demonstrative pronoun in the Gothic language.

		Masc	Neut	Fem
		tot	to	ta
sing	N	sa	þata	so
	G	þis	þis	þizos
	D	þamma	þamma	þizai
	A	þana	þata	þo
pl	N	þai	þo	þos
	G	þize	þize	þizo
	D	þaim	þaim	þaim
	A	þans	þo	þos

Strong declension in Old English

		Masc	Neut	Fem
sing	N	zōd	zōd	zōd
	G	zōdes	zōdes	zōdre
	D	zōdum	zōdum	zōdre
	A	zōdne	zōd	zōde
	Inst	zōde	zōde	zōde
pl	N	zōde	zōd	zōda
	G	zōdra	zōdra	zōdra
	D	zōdum	zōdum	zōdum
	A	zōde	zōd	zōda

Demonstrative pronoun

		Masc	Neut	Fem
sing	N	sē	þæt	seo
	G	þæs	þæs	þære
	D	þæm	þæm	þære
	A	þone	þæt	þa
	Inst	þý, þon	þý, þon	þa
pl	N	þā		
	G	þāra, þára		
	D	þām, þæm		
	A	þā		

Adjectives in the Old Germanic languages developed another set of case endings, based on the weak declension of nouns. This type is called **weak declension** and it is used when adjectives are preceded by demonstrative or possessive pronouns.

Gothic

		Masc	Neut	Fem
sing	N	blindā	blindō	blindō
	G	blindins	blindins	blindōns
	D	blindin	blindin	blindōn
	A	blindan	blindō	blindōn
pl	N	blindans	blindōna	blindōns
	G	blindanē	blindanē	blindōnō
	D	blindam	blindam	blindōm
	A	blindans	blindōna	blindōns

Old English

		Masc	Neut	Fem
sing	N	zōda	zōde	zōde
	G	zōdan	zōdan	zōdan
	D	zōdan	zōdan	zōdan
	A	zōdan	zōde	zōdan
pl	N	zōdan		
	G	zōdra		
	D	zōdum		
	A	zōdan		

Thus most adjectives in the Old Germanic languages could be declined in two ways: according to the weak and strong declension. The difference between the strong and the weak declension of adjectives was not only formal but also semantic. Unlike a noun, an adjective did not belong to a certain type of declension. Most adjectives could be declined in both ways. The strong forms were associated with the meaning of indefiniteness, the weak forms with the meaning of definiteness. The formal and semantic opposition between the two declensions of adjectives is regarded as a grammatical category of definiteness – indefiniteness.

e.g.

Old English zōd mann (strong) – a good man.

sē zōda mann (weak) – the good man

Degrees of Comparison

Adjectives in Old Germanic languages distinguished three degrees of comparison: positive, comparative and superlative. The regular means used to form the comparative and the superlative were the suffixes:

-iza, -ōza, characterized by rhotacism $z > r$ in the Northern and West Germanic languages and -ist, -ōst for the superlative degree:

Gothic hauhs – „tall” -hauhiza –hauhists

 blinds – blindiza- blindists

Old English lanȝ- lenȝra - lenȝest

Old High German lang – langiro – langist

Old Icelandic langr – lengri – lengstr

Some adjectives formed their comparative and superlative degrees by suppletive forms.

Old English lȳtel -læssa – læst.

Thus adjectives in Old Germanic languages had five grammatical categories: three dependent grammatical categories, i.e forms of agreement of the adjective with the noun it modified – number (blinds – слепой; blindai - слепые), gender (blinds – слепой; blindata – слепое; blinda - слепая) and case; definiteness – indefiniteness and degrees of comparison. Twofold declension of adjectives is a Germanic innovation and cannot be traced in other branches of Indo-European language family. Twofold declension of adjectives is an important common linguistic feature of the Germanic languages on the morphological level.