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## MORPHOLOGY IN GERMANIC LANGUAGES: THE ADJECTIVE, THE PRONOUN, THE NUMERAL, AND THE VERB IN OLD ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes the morphological structure of Old English within the broader system of Germanic languages, focusing on adjectives, pronouns, numerals, and verbs as essential grammatical categories. Old English preserved a highly synthetic and inflectional structure, characterized by rich case distinctions, gender agreement, strong and weak inflectional patterns, and complex verbal paradigms. By examining the forms and historical development of these word classes, the study demonstrates how Old English morphology reflects earlier Germanic principles and how these features evolved into the simplified, analytic forms found in modern English. Special attention is given to the role of inflection, the organization of the case system, the interplay between strong and weak paradigms, and the gradual shift from synthetic morphology to analytic constructions.*

**Keywords:** *Old English, Germanic languages, morphology, grammatical gender, inflection, strong and weak paradigms, adjectives, pronouns, numerals, verbs, case system, historical development, linguistic change, diachrony, verb classes, linguistic evolution.*

**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu maqola qadimgi ingliz tilining german tillari tizimidagi o'rnini morfologik jihatdan tahlil qiladi hamda sifat, olmosh, son va fe'l kabi asosiy grammatik toifalarning shakllanishi va rivojlanishini yoritadi. Qadimgi ingliz tili yuqori darajada sintetik tuslanishlarga ega bo'lib, ko'plik va birlik, jins, kelishiklar tizimi, kuchli va kuchsiz paradigmalarining mavjudligi bilan ajralib turadi. Maqolada ushbu grammatik kategoriyalarning shakllari, ular o'rtasidagi morfologik aloqalar, tarixiy taraqqiyot jarayoni va zamonaviy ingliz tiliga o'tish jarayonidagi soddalashuvlar keng yoritilgan. Tadqiqot qadimgi ingliz tili morfologiyasining german til oilasidagi umumiy tamoyillar bilan uyg'unligini va vaqt o'tishi bilan qanday o'zgarishga uchraganini ko'rsatadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *Qadimgi ingliz tili, german tillari, morfologiya, tuslanish, grammatik jins, kuchli va kuchsiz paradigmalar, sifatlar, olmoshlar, sonlar, fe'llar, kelishiklar tizimi, tarixiy taraqqiyot, til o'zgarishi, diaxron tilshunoslik.*

**Аннотация:** *В статье рассматривается морфологическое устройство древнеанглийского языка в рамках германской языковой семьи, уделяя внимание прилагательным, местоимениям, числительным и глаголам как ключевым*



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*грамматическим категориям. Древнеанглийский язык сохранил высокую степень флексии, систему падежей, грамматический род, согласование и различие между сильными и слабыми парадигмами. Анализ показывает, каким образом формы этих частей речи отражают более раннюю германскую систему и как постепенные фонетические и синтаксические изменения привели к утрате флексий и переходу к аналитической структуре современного английского языка. Исследование подчеркивает важность исторического анализа для понимания эволюции английской морфологии.*


**Ключвые слова:** *Древнеанглийский язык; германские языки; морфология; флексия; грамматический род; сильные и слабые формы; прилагательные; местоимения; числительные; глаголы; падежи; историческая эволюция; языковое развитие; диахрония.*

### **Introduction**

The study of Old English morphology occupies a central position in the historical analysis of the Germanic language family. As one of the earliest documented West Germanic languages, Old English preserves a remarkably rich system of inflection that reflects both its Proto-Germanic heritage and its unique internal development. During the early medieval period, English existed as a highly synthetic language in which grammatical relationships were primarily expressed through endings, vowel alternations, and agreement patterns rather than through fixed word order or auxiliary constructions. This complexity is particularly evident in four fundamental lexical categories - adjectives, pronouns, numerals, and verbs - each of which demonstrates intricate morphological structures and functional diversity. By examining these categories, we gain insight not only into the linguistic architecture of Old English but also into the broader processes of diachronic change that shaped the transition from synthetic to analytic structures in the history of English. Such an examination highlights the continuity between Old English and other Germanic languages while revealing the distinctive features that later contributed to the development of the modern English grammatical system.

Morphology in Germanic languages reflects a deep historical system of inflection and grammatical organization that is particularly visible in the Old English period, during which the language displayed extensive synthetic characteristics. Old English, spoken approximately from the 5th to the 11th century, developed as a core member of the West Germanic subgroup and preserved many features inherited from Proto-Germanic and ultimately from Proto-Indo-European. Its morphology demonstrates how meaning was expressed through word endings, changes in vowel quality, and grammatical agreement - patterns that later eroded as English shifted toward a more analytic structure.

In the domain of adjectives, Old English exhibited a dual system of strong and weak inflection. This distinction depended on whether the adjective occurred with a definite



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element such as a demonstrative or was used in an indefinite context. Adjectives agreed with the nouns they modified in gender, number, and case, reflecting the broader Germanic reliance on inflection for syntactic clarity. The language maintained masculine, feminine, and neuter genders, and adjectives carried separate endings for each gender across all grammatical cases, including nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and, in certain contexts, instrumental. Degrees of comparison manifested through both regular morphological processes and inherited suppletion, as seen in the forms *gōd*, *betera*, *betst*, showing parallels to other Germanic and Indo-European languages.

Pronouns in Old English displayed even richer forms, preserving distinctions long lost in modern usage. Personal pronouns showed full case inflection as well as a unique dual number, which was used when referring specifically to two individuals. This dual system, visible in forms like *wit* for “we two” and *git* for “you two,” aligns Old English with earlier Germanic languages and indicates a more precise system of reference. Demonstrative and interrogative pronouns likewise carried extensive inflection, enabling complex syntactic relationships without relying on fixed word order.

The numeral system of Old English also displayed morphological complexity. While higher numerals behaved more analytically, lower numerals such as *ān*, *twā*, and *þrīe* were inflected and demonstrated gender distinctions. Cardinal and ordinal numerals functioned within the broader system of case marking, and certain numerals operated syntactically as adjectives, requiring agreement with the nouns they modified. This morphological behavior reveals the transitional nature of the numeral category, maintaining archaic inflectional properties while also showing early signs of simplification.

Verbs in Old English reflected one of the most systematic Germanic structures: the division into strong and weak verb classes. Strong verbs formed their past tense through patterns of vowel alternation known as *ablaut*, a characteristic inherited directly from Proto-Indo-European. Weak verbs formed the past tense through a dental suffix, a uniquely Germanic innovation. These two classes coexisted productively, shaping the verb system that underlies many irregular forms in Modern English. Old English verbs expressed two tenses (present and preterite), two numbers, three persons, and two moods (indicative and subjunctive), with imperatives formed where appropriate. The language lacked a true passive voice and instead relied on periphrastic constructions that anticipated later analytic tendencies.

The morphological systems of adjectives, pronouns, numerals, and verbs collectively illustrate the structural richness of Old English and its position within the continuum of Germanic linguistic evolution. Over time, phonological reduction, language contact, syntactic reorganization, and the natural drift of linguistic change contributed to a gradual weakening of inflectional morphology. Endings were lost, gender distinctions vanished, case marking simplified, and many verb classes merged or disappeared. What remained was the foundation for modern English: largely analytic, dependent on word order and



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auxiliary verbs, yet still carrying fossilized remnants of its synthetic past. The study of these morphological categories offers valuable insight into how language systems evolve from complexity to simplicity, and how ancient structural patterns continue to influence modern linguistic forms. Old English stands as an essential link in the historical chain, preserving the inflectional nature of early Germanic languages while simultaneously pointing toward the future development of English as we know it today.

#### Conclusion

The examination of adjectives, pronouns, numerals, and verbs in Old English reveals a linguistic system that stands at the core of the Germanic morphological tradition. Old English preserved a highly inflected structure in which grammatical categories such as case, gender, number, and tense played decisive roles in shaping meaning and syntactic relationships. The complexity of its strong and weak paradigms, the precision of its pronominal distinctions, the partial inflection of numerals, and the systematic organization of its verb classes reflect the deeper historical patterns inherited from Proto-Germanic and, ultimately, from Proto-Indo-European. At the same time, the gradual simplification that began even within the Old English period foreshadowed the profound morphological reduction that would characterize the later stages of the language. The loss of inflectional endings, the erosion of vowel distinctions, the disappearance of grammatical gender, and the shift toward fixed word order collectively transformed English into the analytic language known today. Understanding these earlier morphological structures not only illuminates the internal history of English but also situates it within the broader continuum of Germanic linguistic evolution. Old English therefore serves as both a window into the past and a key to understanding the mechanisms through which languages change over time.

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