ON MORPHOLOGICAL RESTRUCTURING IN THE OLD ENGLISH AND OLD SAXON NOMINAL PARADIGMS

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One of the prominent features of the early Germanic nominal inflection was the presence of extensive restructuring processes, affecting the minor (i.e. unproductive) paradigm. The development was manifested in the gradual expansion and permeation of the productive inflection (notably $a$- and $o$-stems) into the paradigm of the unproductive types. The present paper investigates the process of morphological restructuring in one of the minor inflectional types, namely the $i$-stem declension, as attested in the two representatives of the Ingvaeonic subbranch of Germanic: Old English and Old Saxon. The material offered by both languages evinces a striking instability of the original $i$-stem type which inclines towards the productive inflection. The fluctuation between the inflectional paradigms in both languages attests to the process of ongoing reanalysis, resulting in the eventual demise of the etymological stem type distinctions. The present study will attempt to determine the pattern of dissemination of the productive inflection in the original $i$-stems. It is assumed that the two investigated languages display some discrepant behaviour with respect to the process of paradigmatic restructuring. Accordingly, the analysis seeks to trace down and compare the peculiarities and tendencies characteristic of both languages, including those with respect to which the two do not pattern alike.

1. Introductory remarks

The present paper addresses the issue of morphological constitution of the early Germanic nominal system, focusing on the developments

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which resulted in its later restructuring in individual Germanic dialects.\(^2\) One of the salient features of the early Germanic substantival inflection was an evident predilection, revealed by nouns traditionally classified as minor, i.e. synchronically unproductive, to appropriate the inflectional endings of the major, productive declensional types, such as \(a\)-stems, \(d\)-stems and \(n\)-stems.\(^3\) The ensuing fluctuation of nouns between the inherited and innovative paradigms obscured the once stable and neatly organised system and, consequently, shattered the stability of certain declensional paradigms. The phenomenon has been briefly referred to, among others, by Ramat (1981, 61) who observes:

(...) Es kann daher nicht erstaunen, daß im Germ. einige Flexionstypen zu Gunsten anderer, häufigerer Typen durch Analogie aufgegeben wurden. So wurde nicht nur der heteroklitische Typus (der schon in der idg. Epoche nicht mehr produktiv war) wie in allen anderen Sprachen derselben Familie aufgegeben (...), sondern auch die Deklination der \(i\)-Stämme nimmt viele Formen der \(a\)-Stämme auf, die \(u\)-Deklination weist zahlreiche Formen der \(i\)- bzw. \(a\)-Deklination auf, usw.

The marked inclination of some nouns is attested in all minor declensional patterns, including the formations containing the original \(i\)-stems, known in the standard historical grammars of particular Germanic languages as the \(i\)-declension.\(^4\) This very numerous (well attested primarily in the masculine and feminine gender), yet unstable group of nouns constitutes the focus of the present study. The investigation, comparative in nature, takes into account the data provided by

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\(^{2}\) The term “early Germanic inflection” refers here to the inflection of early Germanic languages rather than of the early Germanic language, understood as some stage of Proto-Germanic.

\(^{3}\) The terms “productive” and “unproductive” are employed here in line with the definition of productivity provided by Wurzel (1989, 149), whereby a productive inflectional class needs to fulfill the following criteria: (a) ability to acquire new words (borrowings and neologisms), (b) ability to attract words from other inflectional classes, and (c) resistance to losing words to other inflectional classes. An unproductive inflectional class, in contrast, is one which does not meet any of the abovementioned requirements.

\(^{4}\) See, for example, the grammars by Campbell (1959), Brunner (1965), Lass (1994) for Old English, and Gallée (1993), Holthausen (1921) for Old Saxon.