Language



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Old English

A Fusional Language

Fusional languages (Latin, German, Old English) may overlay multiple data points onto the same morpheme.

m	singular	plural
Nom.	stān	stānas
Acc.	stān	stānas
Gen.	stānes	stāna
Dat.	stāne	stānum

Thus *-es* conveys:

- Case (genitive)
- Number (singular)
- Gender (masculine/neuter)

Flexible Word Order

The servant	seeks	the king
The king	seeks	the servant

Se þēow	sēceð	þone cyning
Þone cyning	sēceð	se þēow
Þone cyning	se þēow	sēceð
Se þēow	þone cyning	sēceð
Se cyning	sēceð	þone þēaw

Learn to parse!

- Divide a sentence up into clauses where applicable:
  - *She says* | *she can't*
- This is easiest if you first identify conjunctions:
  - *I run* | *because* *I must*
- Identify [subject], predicator, <direct object>, (indirect object):
  - [Mary] gave (John) <a punch in the face>
- Identify prepositional and adverbial phrases:
  - *It was Colonel Mustard in the library with the lead pipe*
  - *The world ended yesterday*
- Identify inflections to analyze syntax and phrases:
  - *Dem Mann gab die Frau ein Geschenk Gottes*
  - *Hie wæron englum gelice*

Tools

- Textbook, e.g. Peter Baker's *Introduction to Old English*
- Magic Sheet of Old English Inflections (oldenglishaerobics.net/resources/magic_A4.pdf)
- Strong verb cheatsheet (see StudIP)
- Flashcards (e.g. yorku.ca/inpar; langeslag.uni-goettingen.de/flash/; DIY)

Comparative Grammar

Orthography and Pronunciation

Old English	Old Low German	Old High German	Sense
þ = ð	*th = ð = đ*		
p = w	*k = c, ā = â*	*k = c, ā = â*	
dæġ	dag	tag	day
drīfan	drīban	trīban	drive
þanc	thank	dank	gratitude/mercy
peorðiġ	uuirthig	uuirdīg	worthy
birnan	brinnan	prinnan	burn
ġefremede	gefremida	kifrumita	did, accomplished
hpæt	huuat	uuaz (“waʒ”)	what
mūð	mūth	mund	mouth
nama	namo	namo	name
lēoda	liudio	liudo	people (*gp*)

“North Sea Germanic” / “Ingvaeonic”

- Groups together English, Frisian, and sometimes Low German for their shared features
- Traditionally understood as having developed as a branch of West Germanic
- Alternatively explained by migration patterns
- Hines et al. 2017 makes clear the traditional account still has a great deal of support

Selected Features of North Sea Germanic

Phonology

- Loss of nasal + compensatory lengthening before fricative: OE/OLG/OFr *fīf* vs OHG *fimf*
- Fronting of PG *ǣ*: OE *dǣd*, OFr *dēd* vs OLG *dād*, OHG *tāt*
- Rounding of *a* before nasal: OE *mann/monn*, *mōnaþ*, OFr *mon*, *mōnath* vs OLG *mann*, *mānuth*, OHG *man*, *mānōd*

Morphology

- *Einheitsplural*: OE *faraþ*, OLG *farat*, OFr *farath* vs OHG *fuorīm*, *fuorīt*, *fuorīn*

Some features no longer recognizable by the written period, e.g. unrounded OE *mann*.

High German Consonant Shift 1/2

/p/ after vowels	→	/ff/ <ff>
/t/ after vowels	→	/ss/ <zz>
/k/ after vowels	→	/xx/ <hh/ch>
/p/ initially, after /lmnr/, or geminated	→	/pf/ <pf>
/t/ initially, after /lmnr/, or geminated	→	/ts/ <z>
/k/ initially, after /lmnr/, or geminated	→	/kx/ <ch/kh>
/d/ in some cases	→	/t/
/b/ mostly in geminates	→	/p/
/g/ mostly in geminates	→	/k/

High German Consonant Shift 2/2

PG	OLG	OE	PDE	OHG	German
pō-	apo	apa	ape	affe	Affe
*etan	etan	etan	eat	ezzen	essen
*makōn	makōn	macian	make	mahhōn	machen
*apala-	appul	æppel	apple	apful	Apfel
*twai	twā	twā	two	zwei	zwei
*daga-	dag	dæg	day	tacg	Tag
*rebja-	ribbi	ribb	rib	rippi/ribbi	Rippe

Resources

Dictionaries

Old English

- *DOE*: *Dictionary of Old English: A to Le* (eds Cameron et al., 2024)
- Bosworth and Toller: *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898, 1921, 1972)

Old Low German

- Tiefenbach: *A Concise Old Saxon Dictionary* (2010)
- Sehrt: *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zum Heliand und zur altsächsischen Genesis* (1925)
- Köbler: *Altsächsisches Wörterbuch* (5th ed., 2014)

Old High German

- *AWB*: *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (1968–2024, online edition A–Scuz until 2027)
- Schützeichel: *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (7th ed., 2012)
- Köbler: *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (6th ed., 2014)

Grammars

Comparative

- Fulk, *A Comparative Grammar of the Early Germanic Languages* (2018)
- Robinson, *Old English and Its Closest Relatives* (1992)

Old English

- Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (1959)
- Hogg and Fulk, *A Grammar of Old English* (1992–2011)
- Baker, *Introduction to Old English* (3rd ed., 2012)
- Mitchell and Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* (8th ed., 2012)

Old Low German

- Gallee, *Altsächsische Grammatik* (3rd ed., 1993)

Old High German

- Braune, *Althochdeutsche Grammatik* (17th ed., 2023)

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Bosworth, Joseph, ed. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. Ed. And Enlarged by T. Northcote Toller. With Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda by Alistair Campbell*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973. https://bosworthtoller.com.

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