

A Study of the Inflections in the *Vices and Virtues* — In the case of nouns and adjectives

Naoyoshi Kato*

The inflectional system of OE was quite complex. There were different number, case, and gender in nouns, pronouns and adjectives. The numbers were singular and plural. There was a dual in the 1st and 2nd person pronouns e.g. *wit* (we two) and *git* (you two). The cases were five: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and instrumental. Three genders are found, masculine, feminine, and neuter.

The purpose of this thesis is to make clear the inflectional system in the *Vices and Virtues*. It is clear that the inflections were greatly simplified and reduced. All distinctions of case were nearly lost in ME. There were three causes to take place the simplification in the inflectional system in ME. Sound-change, analogy and the influence of foreign languages can be seen as those causes. The data of this work is circa 1200. The language of the *Vices and Virtues* was written in South Eastern. Citation is by page and line, e.g. (23/12) denoting 'p.23. l.12.'

I. The declension of nouns

(A) The Singular of nouns

(a) Nominative

- | | | |
|---|------|-----------|
| 1. ðe is alre kinge king , | (m.) | (141/26). |
| 2. Eft we finded on ða hali writt ðat ðe cnih t ðe weapne berð un lawliche (m.) | | (121/17). |
| 3. Non scafte ðe is scadwis, | (f.) | (15/2). |
| 4. þe pott ðe is idon on ðe barnende ofne | (m.) | (73/13). |

alder(111/5), ældmone(27/24), aliesend(119/26), dievel(9/25), gelt(51/31), godspellere
(35/24), clerec(81/16), left(95/20), lyon(139/19), man(5/2), mann(3/2), rof(95/7),
smac(17/4), wop(17/32), woreld-mann(57/14), leme(23/9),
frovre(97/1), kæie(7/25), sceawinge(103/12), wulder(5/20), hucche(75/25), iuugman
(67/25), cristeneman(9/17), mone(27/23), olvende(69/9), sothade(127/32), sott(67/17),
eremite(73/27), etc.

The nominative singular became identical with the accusative singular. The strong form in the singular which had no inflectional ending was usually used, but the

* Department of Liberal Arts

nominative feminine singular usually had ending **-e** in early ME. Many examples can be seen in this work as follows: **frovre**, **kæie**, **sceawinge**, etc.

(b) Accusative

1. ða comen ða aingles of heuene and sunge ðane derewurðe **sang** (m.) (15/12).
2. þat hie imetten uel fot, **priest** oðer munec (m.) (29/8).
3. Nim ðin **sweord**, ðat is, godes word (n.) (91/3).
4. Hu michel haht hit is godes **forbod** te brekene! (n.) (11/20).
5. forbet ðine **tunge** fram euele (f.) (59/29).
6. ne swic ðu naure **niht** ne dai ær ðu hes habbe (f.) (31/31).
7. oðer sum oðer **dwel** hie driueð (wk.m.) (29/9).
8. and sand ane **drope** of þire swete mildsce (wk.m.) (145/32).

The nouns that belonged to the Old English weak declension retained their weak inflection; e.g., OE acc. sg. **dropan** > EME **dropen** > LME **drope**

(masculine)

frovregost(83/33), gylt(39/34), halidom(129/31), hunger(143/32), cristendom(7/31), lofsang(19/27), martirdom(129/19), ofspreng(115/2), salm(81/26), tear(145/34), tocyme(31/9), etc.

(feminine)

dure(143/3), midniht(125/13), etc.

(neuter)

gold(17/16), hol(101/28), infare(99/31), lean(5/31), marc(57/31), mod(129/6), etc.

(others)

handsselle(29/10), tidinge(17/17), tresor(135/23), etc.

(c) Genitive

1. bute ðurh **priestes** muðe oðer ðurh **biscope** (m.) (53/12).
2. ðe is swa swiðe **wittes** bedæld (m.) (41/9).
3. his honden namen ðas **trewes** wastme (f.) (119/13).
4. ðat me nis naht of alles **woreldes** blisse (f.) (31/27).
5. Des **flesces** iwill halt oðer-hwile mid him (n.) (89/29).
6. Bland ðies **folkes** hierte (n.) (127/8).
7. buten of ates and of drenches and of here **likames** hlustes (wk.m.) (137/24).
8. ne ne mai godes lare understanden for his **herte** hardnesse (wk.f.) (45/21).

The ending **-es** became the endings of the genitive singular of nouns which had other

endings in Old English.

(masculine)

dievles(19/15), gastes(41/31), godes(3/2), laverdes(17/9), kynges(43/12),
mannes(11/3), manes(15/23), siðes(69/29), sunes(55/18), þankes(111/7),
þralles(49/17), unþankes(69/6), wapmannes(55/13), wittes(41/9), etc.

(feminine)

næddre(101/19), nædle(69/9), niht(49/27), nihtes(17/31), worldes(35/4),
werldes(31/19), wordlles(33/15), etc.

(neuter)

flesches(23/24), heveneriches(57/6), lives(39/25), sades(27/28), scipes(43/33), etc.

(others)

seneveies(29/19), etc.

(d) Dative

1. þat he bie hersum gode, and for his luue, ðe **biscope**, and his **prieste**, and his
louerde (m.) (109/9).
2. he was buhsum ane deadliche manne, Iosepe ðe **smiðe** (m.) (51/4).
3. For ðessere swete **clepienge** cumeð baðe gode and euele (f.) (71/32).
4. nis her nan oðer mang þelliche **timbringe** bute godes hus (f.) (91/17).
5. And als wa als wa man to michel mai drinken of ðare **wine** (n.) (149/6).
6. ga into þine **bedde** (n.) (143/2).
7. for ðo manifelde swinche of fasten and of his **biliue** (wk. m.) (93/17).
8. Hit is a michel reunesse of mani mann ðe is on michele **dwele** (wk. m.) (39/28).
9. he is of ðare ilche **molde** (wk. f.) (57/22).

In the dative singular the old inflectional endings **-e**, **-a**, **-an** were weakened to **-e** in this work. Many of the inflections of the dative singular ended in **-e**.

(masculine)

aðe(9/15), dievlen(57/1), devele(75/18), gaste(21/21), gode(3/16), harme(9/10),
hæðendome(31/7), hungre(95/24), kinge(15/7), cristendome(25/7), mule(89/31),
muðe(3/2), pette(109/19), rade(71/5), regule(73/28), reine(145/2), rove(95/5),
sea((45/9), slape(87/30), stikke(135/1), storme(43/30), swicedome(11/21), etc.

(feminine)

bote(43/32), radinge(27/13), slauphe(5/2), swuster(63/29), worlde(43/6),
wunde(119/20), etc.

(neuter)

bebode(9/11), breade(149/1), flesce(87/29), folke(55/12), forbode(5/22), golde(33/14), hole(101/29), horde(151/17), horse(89/31), huse(27/24), corne(29/19), sade(9/6), sal(149/12), spelle(125/18), wolkne(103/24), worde(41/25), weorke(61/1), etc.

(others)

hordome(121/21), maistre(73/28), paradise(7/18), religiun(5/33), etc.

(B) The Plural of nouns

(a) Nominative

1. All þese þrie **fasten** waren swa selcuðliche swa non oðre (137/16).

2. ne **glewmen**, ne **gaeleres**, ne **wicchen**, ne unriht **domesmann**, ne non ðare
manne ðe on heaued-senne lið and ða luuieð (121/21,22).

The ending **-es** became the ending of the nominative plural, less frequently in **-en**.

kinges(49/27), faderes(7/30), pines(33/33), smekes(129/8), unlustes(107/23),
þinges(29/34), unwillis(107/24), fondinges(107/23), wisdomes(49/30), earen(51/1),
honden(119/13), lemen(27/5), tunges(49/30), widerwinen(5/11), cristene(95/2),
men(3/15), stieresmenn(43/27), etc.

(b) Accusative

1. and ðurh **masses** and **bienes** and **ælmesses** ðe me doð for ðe (65/2,3).

2. ðo **gaten** and ðo **duren** wel bilokin of ðis holi temple (99/23).

3. zecnoust þu godes **bebodes** (67/30).

The accusative plural generally ends in **-es**, **-en**, less frequently in **-e**.

almesses(139/31), ances(35/2), ates(127/12), forbodes(67/31), harmes(59/4),
hordomes(67/31), ydelnesses(133/27), casteles(129/4), craftes(65/12), lemes(131/4),
postes(91/11), scaftes(69/31), unrihtwisnesses(123/2), werkes(7/5), almessen(67/21),
benen(43/13), aten(137/29), bredren(75/31), faten(123/33), handen(17/27),
kenesmen(75/31), pinen(19/9), weapne(121/18), bebode(19/24), etc.

(c) Genitive

1. ðe is alre **kinge** king (141/26).

2. þat he, ðe is alre **kinigene** kyng (95/10).

The endings **-e**, **-es**, **-ene** can be seen in the genitive form.

The weak plural inflection was extended in this work to nouns that were not weak nouns in OE. The weak genitive plural ending **-ene** was extended to nouns that were not weak in OE. e.g. **kingene** kyng.

manne(65/31), mannes(3/5), worlde(63/3), þinge(29/2), etc.

(d) Dative

1. Riht alswo ðe lichame none strençþe ne mai hebben wið-uten **bonen** (93/6).
2. ne mihte hebben wið-uten ðese hali **mihten** (93/7).
3. Swa hie doð ziet on ðese time **munekes, kanunekes, ancres, and eremites** (35/2,3).

dievlen(19/5), friennden(41/22), luven(33/5), mannen(5/11), wisen(15/5), wrechen (69/2), edmodnesses(125/18), fandinges(73/11), nedes(137/6), pineres(75/11), upbreides(41/21), wacches(95/24), windes(43/25), stormes(43/25), etc.

(C) Minor Declensions

(C.1) Umlaut declension

The change of vowel appears in a certain number of nouns in the nominative and accusative plural. There are some examples in the *Vices and Virtues*.

(1) man

Sg. man, mann, manne, mannes, manes, etc.

Pl. men, menn (nom. acc.), manne, mannes, mannen, etc.

1. Alswo ðe **man** ðe haueð islaže anne **mann** azeanes godes forbode (sg.) (5/22).
2. On ða **manne** ðe hie is rixende (sg.) (57/13).
3. þat is, godes luue and **mannes** (sg.) (35/16).
4. and mid sume *men* hie is wunende, and on swiðe feawe **menn** hie is rixende (pl.) (57/12).
5. Nis me nan ofrende swa lief swa godes luue and alre **mannes** (pl.) (3/5).

(2) fot

Sg. fot, fote, etc.

Pl. fet, fiet, fett, etc.

1. seggeð þat hie imetten euel **fot** (sg.) (29/8).
2. ne mid **fote** sitten totrinde (sg.) (135/2).
3. Ðis loc offrede Marie Magdalene upe ðine derewurðe **fiet** (pl.) (85/18).
4. cnyle ðar niðer to-foren hise **fet** (pl.) (145/10).

(C.2) –R declension

(1) broðer

Sg. broðer

Pl. breðren

- | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|
| 1. ðe him besohten of here deade broðer | (sg.) | (111/27). |
| 2. ne ðine breðren ðarto | (pl.) | (75/31). |

(2) fader, moder, swuster, dohter

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| 1. ne mine gastliche faderes | (pl.) | (7/18). |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------|

No other examples in plural could be seen in this work. There is the only example **faderes** I could confirm.

II. The declension of adjectives

(A) The strong declension

The strong singular form which had no ending was used, but plural ending -e was very common in late Middle English.

(A.1) singular

- | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------|
| 1. Ac zif ðu hauest godne radziue, ðu miht ðar wel libben | (<i>m. acc.</i>) | (75/4). |
| 2. ðingþ ðat he seið him god rad | (<i>m. acc.</i>) | (45/29). |
| 3. ðies was god inzied | (<i>f. nom.</i>) | (147/23). |
| 4. Langne first ic ðe zaf wel to donne zif ðu woldest | (<i>m. acc.</i>) | (17/19). |
| 5. and rihtne gost newe inne me | (<i>m. acc.</i>) | (83/9). |

(A.2) plural

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1. and seggeð þat he bien auhte men and gode menn | (79/28). |
| 2. we moten him bien hersum on all gode woerkes | (9/2). |
| 3. Hie ðe takð gode þeawes | (65/12). |
| 4. þe he was bewune to fellen mid gode metes and swete drenches | (139/9). |

(B) The weak declension

If the adjective was preceded by the definite article, by a demonstrative, by a possessive pronoun, or by a noun in the genitive case, the weak form, which mostly ended in -e in this work.

(B.1) singular

1. forðan he hert his **gode** wille (n. acc.) (45/22).
2. non dieuel habben strengþe a3ean ðesses **gode** ileaue (27/11).
3. Noe ðane **gode** stieresmann (43/21).

(B.2) plural

1. oðer ðe *gode* wines (43/15).
2. þat he mihte his **gode** dade forðsceawin þa þe he niede hadde (f. acc.) (147/23).

(C) Comparison of adjectives

1. Ne hafst tu no **lengere** fierst ðanne ðe apostele seið (89/16).
2. **leuere** him was to eten benen and pesen (43/12).
3. ðe he **strengere** and **betere** is on gode werkes (29/23).
4. and swa we mu3en bien ðe **sikerere** of ðese iflite (67/24).
5. Hwi is te ðin hucche **trewer** ðanne ich? (75/25).

The comparative was generally formed by means of **-re**. In OE. the comparative ending **-ra** became **-re**. In ME the comparative was generally formed by means of **-re**, later **-er** form was frequently used in late ME. The example of the irregular comparison, **betere** could be seen in this work.

The inflection of the Old English noun indicates distinction of number and case. It is necessary here to present the inflections of the Old English nouns in detail. I can confirm the differences between the inflections of the Old English and those of the Middle English, in particularly of this work the *Vices and Virtues*.

Strong

	Masc.	Neuter		Feminine	
		short	long	short	long
Sg. N.	bat	scip	horn	scinu	glof
G.	bates	scipes	hornes	scine	glofe
D.	bate	scipe	home	scine	glofe
A.	bat	scip	horn	scine	glofe
Pl. N.A.	batas	scipu	horn	scina,-e	glofa, -e
G.	bata	scipa	horna	scina	gloga
D.	batum	scipum	hornum	scinum	glofum

(Moor, S & Marckwardt, A. H. *Historical Outline of English Sounds and Inflections*. P.22)

Next I will show the inflection of the nouns in the *Vices and Virtues* to make clear the

levelling of inflectional endings. In the following table the development of the Middle English noun declensions could be shown.

(Strong declension in the *Vices and Virtues*)

	Masc.	Neuter	Feminine
Sg.N.	--	--	--, -e
G.	-es	-es	-es
D.	-e	-e	-e
A.	--	--	--, -e
Pl. N.A.	-es, -en		
G.	-e, -es, -ene		
D.	-es, -en		

One of the most characteristic differences between Old English and Middle English is the breaking up of the old system of inflections. In this work, chiefly two methods of indicating the plural remained fairly distinctive: the **-es** or **-e** from the strong declension and the **-en** from the weak. But the **-en** plural was used widely, being often added to nouns which had not belonged to the weak declension in Old English. There was no strict rule to add the **-en** to nouns in strong declension.

Every adjective was inflected according to either one of two declensions in Old English. There were many instances of the acc. sg. **-ne** and plural **-e**.

In this work the *Vices and Virtues*, I could confirm the tendency towards levelling and the simplification of the inflectional endings to a degree.

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(Received December 7, 1998)