



Middle High German: Morphology I

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MHG Strong and Weak Adjectives

Unlike nouns, adjectives can be 'strong' or 'weak', depending on position:

- After **definite** article: **Weak**
- After **indefinite** article: **Strong**
- After possessives or *dirre*: **Weak or Strong**
- Used attributively/predicatively: **Often no ending**
e.g. *der heilec geist / si funden in tôten* vs. *er wære rôht*

Adjectives can follow, as well as precede, nouns:

e.g. *die küneginne guot*

NHG now has three adjective declensions:

Strong (indefinite article)

Weak (definite article)

Mixed (no article)

MHG Adjectives (Weak)

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	<i>quote</i>	<i>quote</i>	<i>quote</i>
	ACC	<i>-en</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>-e</i>
	GEN	<i>-en</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>-en</i>
	DAT	<i>-en</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>-en</i>
PL	NOM	<i>-en</i>		
	ACC			
	GEN			
	DAT			

MHG Adjectives (Strong)

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	guot <i>er</i>	guot <i>iu</i>	guot <i>ez</i>
	ACC	- <i>en</i>	- <i>e</i>	- <i>ez</i>
	GEN	- <i>es</i>	- <i>er(e)</i>	- <i>es</i>
	DAT	- <i>em(e)</i>	- <i>er(e)</i>	- <i>em(e)</i>
PL	NOM	- <i>e</i>	- <i>e</i>	- <i>iu</i>
	ACC	- <i>e</i>	- <i>e</i>	- <i>iu</i>
	GEN	- <i>er(e)</i>	- <i>er(e)</i>	- <i>er(e)</i>
	DAT	- <i>en</i>	- <i>en</i>	- <i>en</i>

MHG articles

The indefinite article

	M	F	N
NOM	ein	ein	ein
ACC	einen	eine	ein
GEN	eines	einer(e)	eines
DAT	einem(e)	einer(e)	einem

The indefinite article was declined like a strong adjective, but typically had no ending for the NOM.SG forms of all genders (where the strong adjectives may end *-er*, *-iu*, *-ez* respectively) or the neuter ACC.SG (where adjectives would have *-ez*).

MHG articles

The definite article

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	der	diu	daz
	ACC	den	die	daz
	GEN	des	der(e)	des
	DAT	dem(e)	der(e)	dem(e)
PL	NOM	die	die	diu
	ACC	die	die	diu
	GEN	der(e)	der(e)	der(e)
	DAT	den	den	den

What has become the NHG definite article (*der, die, das...*) served in MHG as both definite article and demonstrative pronoun/determiner (i.e. ‘the’ vs. ‘that’/‘that one’ &c.).

MHG articles

Demonstrative pronoun 'this'

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	dirre (diser)	disiu	ditze, ditz, diʒ
	ACC	disen	dise	ditze, ditz, diʒ
	GEN	dises	dirre	dises
	DAT	disem(e)	dirre	disem(e)
PL	NOM	dise	dise	disiu
	ACC	dise	dise	disiu
	GEN	dirre	dirre	dirre
	DAT	disen	disen	disen

These endings are essentially the same as the definite article *dirre* < *dis-re* (earlier *diser*)

MHG Nouns

Classified as **strong** or **weak**

Depends on whether the stem originally ended with a **vowel** or **consonant**

In Germanic, nouns were formed from a *root*, a *stem extension* [defined declension class but had no other 'meaning'] and a *suffix*

e.g. *dag-a-z* 'day-stem.extension-NOM.SG'

OHG stems:

-a (-a, -ja, -wa)

-ō (-ō, -jō, -wō)

-i

-u

'Consonantal' *n*-stems

Minor declensions:

(i) monosyllabic consonant stems, (ii) *r*-stems, (iii) *nt*-stems & (iv) *os*-/*es*-stems

Reduction of unstressed syllables
→ The vocalic distinctions
collapse & end up with a single
'strong' class

Old extensions explain certain
MHG forms, especially umlaut

Strong Nouns: *ō*-stem: *stunta* 'time'

		eOHG	MHG	NHG
SG	NOM	stunta ^a	stunde ^e	Stunde ^e
	ACC	stunta ^a	stunde ^e	Stunde ^e
	GEN	stunta ^a , - ^u , - ^o	stunde ^e	Stunde ^e
	DAT	stuntu ^u , - ^o	stunde ^e	Stunde ^e
PL	NOM	stuntā ^a	stunde ^e	Stunden ^{en}
	ACC	stuntā ^a	stunde ^e	Stunden ^{en}
	GEN	stuntō ^{no}	stunden ^{en}	Stunden ^{en}
	DAT	stuntō ^m , - ^{ōn}	stunden ^{en}	Stunden ^{en}

Nouns: OHG → MHG

Reduction of unstressed syllables eliminates many distinctions in inflectional suffixes

OHG nouns ~5–6 distinct endings, MHG nouns ~3–4 (increase in syncretism)

Declension class shifts and mergers

Final obstruent devoicing (*Auslautverhärtung*) increases variation in stem consonants: OHG *tag~tages* vs. MHG *tac~tages*

Instrumental case does not survive in nouns (although it just about clings on elsewhere, e.g. pronouns).

MHG Nouns: Key differences to NHG

DAT.**MASC**/**NEUT**.SG often ends *-e*

dem gaste

Many NOM/ACC.**NEUT**.PL forms have no ending

wort~wort

FEM *-(e)n* does not reliably indicate plural

- Some have it only GEN/DAT.PL: *der geben, den geben*
- Others in all forms except NOM.SG: *zunge~zungen*

Some nouns (especially kinship terms) are uninflected throughout the singular

des bruoder, des vater

MHG Strong Nouns (Masculine)

		I			II	III	IV	
SG	NOM	tac	sper	sē	hirte	gast	vater	mann
	ACC	tac	sper	sē	hirte	gast	vater	mann
	GEN	tages	sper	sēwes	hirtes	gastes	vater(s)	mann(es)
	DAT	tage	sper	sēwe	hirte	gaste	vater	mann(e)
PL	NOM	tage	sper	sēwe	hirte	geste	vet	mann(e)
	ACC	tage	sper	sēwe	hirte	geste	vet	mann(e)
	GEN	tage	sper	sēwe	hirte	geste	vet	mann(e)
	DAT	tagen	spern	sēwen	hirten	gesten	vetern	mann(en)
		<i>day</i>	<i>spear</i>	<i>sea, lake</i>	<i>shepherd</i>	<i>stranger</i>	<i>father</i>	<i>man</i>

MHG Strong Nouns (Masculine)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	-(e)s
	DAT	-(e)
PL	NOM/ACC/GEN	-(e)
	DAT	-(e)n

Form plural with /-ə/ or -∅

- Some have no [ə] in the endings (or no endings at all)
- Some V-final stems (old *-wa* nouns) have a [w] between stem & suffix
- Some stems umlaut

MHG Strong Nouns (Masculine)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	-(e)s
	DAT	-(e)
PL	NOM/ACC/GEN	-(e)
	DAT	-(e)n

<i>a</i> -stems	ACC.SG	er werbe naht unde tac	531
	ACC.PL	ich wil rouben alle tage	379
<i>i</i> -stems	DAT.SG	zuo dem sune er in spotte sprach	234
	ACC.PL	nû heiz ander dîne süne	364

MHG Strong Nouns (Feminine)

		I		II
SG	NOM	gebe	zal	kraft
	ACC	gebe	zal	kraft
	GEN	gebe	zal	kr efte , kraft
	DAT	gebe	zal	kr efte , kraft
PL	NOM	gebe	zal	kr efte
	ACC	gebe	zal	kr efte
	GEN	geben n	zaln n	kr efte n n
	DAT	geben n	zaln n	kr efte n n

MHG Strong Nouns (Feminine)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	—, "-e
	DAT	—, "-e
PL	NOM/ACC	—, "-e
	GEN	-n, "-en
	DAT	-n, "-en

I: Same SG and NOM/ACC.PL

- Stem mostly ends /-ə/

II: Umlaut & /-ə/-plural

- Mostly old *i*-stems
- Some have unumlauted alternants, e.g. *hende~hande*

The *wō*-stems have alternative forms (with and without /w/)

- SG *brāwe~brā*, PL *brā* or weak declension *brawen*

MHG *muoter* & *tochter* umlaut in the PL

MHG Strong Nouns (Feminine)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	—, "-e
	DAT	—, "-e
PL	NOM/ACC	—, "-e
	GEN	-n, "-en
	DAT	-n, "-en

<i>ō</i> -stems	NOM.SG	In enhalf et niht sîn lêre	591
	DAT.SG	nû volge miner lêre	287
<i>i</i> -stems	NOM.SG	Dô sprach diu brût Gotelint	1575
	DAT.SG	dem briutegomen und der briute	1538
	DAT.SG	sô bin ich an deheiner stete	849
	DAT.SG	an der stat, dâ si was ê	1124

MHG Strong Nouns (Neuter)

		I				II
SG	NOM	wort	venster	künne	knie	lamp
	ACC	wort	venster	künne	knie	lamp
	GEN	wortes	vensters	künnes	knie w es, knies	lambes
	DAT	worte	venster	künne	knie w e, knie	lambe
PL	NOM	wort	venster	künne	knie	le m ber
	ACC	wort	venster	künne	knie	le m ber
	GEN	worte	venster	künne	knie w e, knie	le m ber
	DAT	worten	venstern	künnen	knie w en, knien	le m bern

MHG Strong Nouns (Neuter)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	-(e) s
	DAT	—, - e
PL	NOM/ACC	—, "- er
	GEN	- e , "- er
	DAT	-(e) n , "- ern

I: Same NOM/ACC SG and PL: -∅

- Umlauted stems end in /-ə/
- *wa*-stems usually insert /w/

II: Plural with umlaut and /-ər/

- Old -os/-es stems

MHG Strong Nouns (Neuter)

SG	NOM/ACC	—
	GEN	-(e) s
	DAT	—, - e
PL	NOM/ACC	—, "- er
	GEN	- e , "- er
	DAT	-(e) n , "- ern

<i>a</i> -stems	ACC.PL	hêt ir sô scherphiu wort / niht gesprochen	1288
	GEN.PL	der was der worte wîse	1508
<i>az-/iz</i> -stems	ACC.SG	er nam dz ros, er nam daz rint	1575
	ACC.PL	ich muoz et haben rinder	1538

MHG Weak Nouns

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	name ^e	zunge ^e	härze ^e
	ACC	namen	zungen	härze ^e
	GEN	namen	zungen	härzen
	DAT	namen	zungen	härzen
PL	NOM	namen	zungen	härzen
	ACC	namen	zungen	härzen
	GEN	namen	zungen	härzen
	DAT	namen	zungen	härzen

MHG Weak Nouns

MASC	NOM.SG	ûf stuont ein alter grîse	1507
	DAT.SG	dem briutegomen und der briute	1538
FEM	GEN.SG	sô hûete diner hûben	429
	DAT.SG	mit sîner gîgen huob er an	944
NEUT	NOM.SG	mîn ouge der vil dicke siht / die ...	114
	ACC.PL	der scherge im ûz diu ougen stach	1688

OHG

		M	N	F
SG	NOM	namo	hërza	zunga
	ACC	namon, -un	hërza	zungūn
	GEN	namen, -in	hërzen, -in	zungūn
	DAT	namen, -in	hërzen, -in	zungūn
PL	NOM	namon, -un	hërzun, -on	zungūn
	ACC	namon, -un	hërzun, -on	zungūn
	GEN	namōno	hërzōno	zungōno
	DAT	namōm, -ōn	hërzōm, -ōn	zungōm, -ōn

Notker Labeo (ca. 960–1021)

...În getûo fôlgên dînen uuórtên• únde er mîr únne• dés îh pegínne...

(Nc 03519)

fulserit uoluntas. In getuo fôlgên dînen uuórtên unde er mîr
lúnne• des îh pegínne. ¶ NÛ SINE ALIË ROADIRÉ IOYË Ñ OPORTÉ RÊ
bæ dicente mercurio quon potius inqst uirt' sc̃p uir' in iouē uoce



Ratiocinationē
ex eufat
intimū sensū accōmō
si aut comodū nulli
quā alius aut incōm
fuerit illius cōmōdi qd ex
acciderit aut cū il



Notker (late OHG)

		M	N	F
SG	NOM	namo	hërza	zunga
	ACC	nam en	hërza	zungūn
	GEN	namen	hërzen	zungūn
	DAT	namen	hërzen	zungūn
PL	NOM	nam en	hërz en	zungūn
	ACC	nam en	hërz en	zungūn
	GEN	nam ōn	hërz ōn	zung ōn
	DAT	namōn	hërzōn	zungōn

MHG

		M	N	F
SG	NOM	name e	härze e	zung e
	ACC	namen	härze e	zung en
	GEN	namen	härzen	zung en
	DAT	namen	härzen	zung en
PL	NOM	namen	härzen	zung en
	ACC	namen	härzen	zung en
	GEN	nam en	härz en	zung en
	DAT	nam en	härz en	zung en

Changes to MHG Nouns

Strong masculine nouns:

Many Class I have moved to Class III (with umlaut)

- e.g. MHG *nagele*~*nägele*, NHG *Hof* (SG: MHG *hof*) *Höfe* (PL: MHG *hove*)

Masculine Class II:

- Only *kæse* survives
- Some changed gender, e.g. *site* (*die Sitte*)
- Some became weak, e.g. *hirte* (*der Hirt*)

MHG *man* now follows the pattern of *Lamm* (Neuter Class II strong)

Weak masculine nouns much reduced

- Almost exclusively animates in NHG
- Many have become strong, e.g. *han*, *sterne*
- Inanimates have almost all become strong, e.g. *Brunnen* (< MHG *brunne*)
- Some lost the final *-e*
- A few Class II words have become weak (both Class II and weak have *e*-final NOM forms)

Changes to MHG Nouns

Feminine Nouns:

Umlaut restricted to PL in Class II

Weak feminines disappear

Confusion even in MHG between *w* & *s*

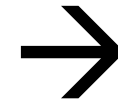
- NOM.SG matched & levelled across all SG
- GEN/DAT.PL matched & levelled across PL

Many Class I have become Class II, e.g. *zal*

		Strong I	Weak
SG	NOM	gebe	zunge
	ACC	gebe	zungen
	GEN	gebe	zungen
	DAT	gebe	zungen
PL	NOM	gebe	zungen
	ACC	gebe	zungen
	GEN	geben	zungen
	DAT	geben	zungen

Changes to MHG Nouns

		Weak	I	II
SG	NOM	zunge	gebe	kraft
	ACC	zungen	gebe	kraft
	GEN	zungen	gebe	krefte
	DAT	zungen	gebe	krefte
PL	NOM	zungen	gebe	krefte
	ACC	zungen	gebe	krefte
	GEN	zungen	geben	kreften
	DAT	zungen	geben	kreften



		Weak/I	II
SG	NOM	Zunge	Kraft
	ACC	Zunge	Kraft
	GEN	Zunge	Kräft
	DAT	Zunge	Kräft
PL	NOM	Zungen	Kräfte
	ACC	Zungen	Kräfte
	GEN	Zungen	Kräfte
	DAT	Zungen	Kräften

Changes to MHG Nouns

Neuter Nouns:

Initially very few Class II ("-er), but ~20 words join the class in MHG
In NHG, there are ~100 (with a few masculines, e.g. *männer*)

Only four weak nouns in MHG: *herze, ôre, ouge, wange*

→ Weak neuter class disappears

- *Herz* alone retains traces of weak declension (now *des Herzens*)
- *Wange* became feminine
- *Auge, Ohr* only retain *-en* plural
 - *Ende, Hemd & Bett* have also adopted this pattern

Broad trends

Loss of distinct forms from OHG

- Reduction of unstressed syllables
- Weak nouns have only two forms
- FEM *i*-stems lose their umlauted SG forms
- Gender distinctions lost in weak noun endings (all end in $-\emptyset$ or $-(e)n$)
- Irregulars absorbed into other declensions

Since MHG

NEUT nouns with $-\emptyset$ NOM/ACC.PL absorbed into $-er$ declension (e.g. *kint*)

Feminine weak nouns and $\bar{o}$ -stems now form a single mixed declension

The primacy of number has led to levelling across paradigms

More on this to come, when we discuss *analogy*.