

Nathalie Fromm: Diachronic development of the former feminine *ō*-stems in German dialects

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The diachronic reorganization of the nominal inflection system in German can be characterized by two major tendencies: the strengthening of the number category, accompanied by the oftentimes simultaneous reduction of the category of case. Both developments are empirically well researched and have commonly been referred to as “Numerusprofilierung” and “Kasusnivellierung” (cf. Hotzenköcherle 1962; Wegera 1987; Hartweg/Wegera 2005; Nübling 2005, 2008; for further specification of the definition of “Numerusprofilierung” cf. Dammel/Gillmann 2014). A prime example of the interaction between both is the emergence of a new feminine class in Early New High German. This class is a merger of two productive feminine classes: the *ō*-stems and the *n*-stems. The *n*-stems adopted the singular paradigm of the *ō*-stems (unmarked cases) whereas the *ō*-stems followed the inflectional pattern of the *n*-stems in plural (*n*-suffix in all cases). This change leads to a reduction of case forms as well as to an increased marking of number, cf. (1) and (2).

The generalization of the *n*-suffix is almost completed in the 15th century (Ebert 1993: S. 179). The case leveling of the feminine *n*-stems begins in Middle High German but extends into the 18th century (Ebert 1993: S. 178; Pavlov 1995: S. 192). Both Early New High German and Middle High German refer to a multitude of different dialects, which are characterized by various local and regional distinctions. Therefore, at the same point in time, the stages of development of these processes may differ throughout the different German dialects.

This paper focuses on the development of the feminine *ō*-stems and thus, on the expansion of number marking in the plural paradigm. It is part of a larger study, that deals with the different developments of the German nominal inflection system leading to the strengthening of the number category, based on data from historical corpora such as the *Reference Corpus of Old German*, the *Reference Corpus of Middle High German*, and the *Reference Corpus of Early New High German*. At this point an exemplary examination should first provide insight concerning the diachronic development of the former feminine *ō*-stems in various German dialects and the timeline of the gradual discontinuation of case markers.

Tables

(1) Declension of *zunge* ‘tongue’ (*n*-stem) and of *varwe* ‘colour’ *ō*-stem in Middle High German

Sg.	Nom.	<i>zunge</i> _	<i>varwe</i> _
	Gen.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwe</i> _
	Dat.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwe</i> _
	Acc.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwe</i> _
Pl.	Nom.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwe</i> _
	Gen.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwen</i>
	Dat.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwen</i>
	Acc.	<i>zungen</i>	<i>varwe</i> _

(2) Declension of *zunge* ‘tongue’ and of *varwe* ‘colour’ in New High German

Sg. Nom.-Acc.	<i>Zunge</i>	<i>Farbe</i>
Pl. Nom.-Acc.	<i>Zungen</i>	<i>Farben</i>

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