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FEATURES OF THE GOTHIC ADJECTIVE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DETERMINATION¹

1. In a discussion of the origins of the Germanic strong-weak adjective distinction, Ringe [Ringe 2006, 170] observes that in some archaic documents (particularly *Beowulf*), contrary to the convention, the weak adjective is sometimes found unaccompanied by a determiner. As a result, he raises the question of “whether the weak suffix is still functioning as a definite article in those instances or whether the examples are simply formulaic expressions of the oral poetic tradition in which the original function of the *n*-stem suffix has been forgotten.” The underlying assumption here is that the *-n*- element ingrained in the weak inflection was originally (in Proto-Germanic) some kind of definite determiner; vacillation between the use and omission of the definite article with the weak adjective triggers the issue of whether the weak inflection on its own still carries the value of definiteness.

That the weak adjective in Gothic occurs by itself (without any definite determiner) in over a third of attested examples [Ratkus 2011, 136–146] makes the problem as peculiar to Gothic – and more broadly older Germanic – as it is to Old English. In what follows, the paradigm properties of the Gothic adjective will be assessed in an effort to establish whether a synchronic picture of adjective inflectional morphology in Gothic furnishes any useful insights into the semantic robustness of the weak inflection.

2. As argued by Ratkus [Ratkus 2009], the formal alternations observed in the Gothic adjective system are due to several morphological features, such as inflectional class, stem indexing and syncretic index. None of these morphological features alone is sufficient to justify every type of formal difference and pattern observed in the Gothic adjective system; as a result, reference to each of the features is justified. This discussion draws on Corbett’s and Baerman’s [Corbett, Baerman 2006] typology of morphological features and Corbett’s [Corbett 2005; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2012; 2013] “canonical” infrastructure.

¹ I would like to thank D. Gary Miller for valuable advice and feedback and Matthew Dal Santo for proofreading the manuscript. I alone bear the load and burden of any errors or imperfections.

Designed to capture cross-linguistically attested phenomena in a consistent and orderly manner, the canonical approach sets out by defining the limits of a theoretical space within which individual phenomena are identified [Corbett 2007, 8; 2012, 13]. The canon is located at the point of convergence of every definitional parameter; as such, it epitomises an idealised instance of a linguistic phenomenon, which in its turn represents an ideal point to measure from. Because canonical examples are expected to fit within theoretically prescribed limits, they are either very rare or altogether non-existent [Corbett 2013, 48].

Canonical morphosyntactic features and their values must conform to a number of principles and criteria set forth by Corbett [Corbett 2008; 2009; 2012, Ch. 6]. Prior to discussing the details of Gothic adjective inflections, let us briefly consider how the notion of canonicity applies to paradigm morphology. Criterion 1 (of Principle I) reads: “Canonical features and their values have dedicated forms (are ‘autonomous’)” [Corbett 2012, 156]. According to this, in a canonical scenario, each value intersection in a paradigm corresponds to only one formal means of exponence, which does not surface anywhere else in the system. In other words, a given form correlates exclusively with a given function, and the paradigm exhibits unique exponence in each cell, the total number of cells (i.e. the size of the paradigm) being equivalent to the total number of combinations of the relevant feature values available. Consider two paradigms of a hypothetical language in Figure 1, adapted after Corbett [Ibid., 157].

Figure 1. Non-canonical (left) and canonical (right) morphosyntactic feature values

	SG	PL		SG	PL	
	a	b	NOM	a	b	NOM
	a	e	ACC	x	u	ACC
	b	e	LOC	m	i	LOC
	c	f	DAT	c	f	DAT

This hypothetical language has two numbers and four cases, which generates 8 paradigm cells. In a canonical situation, each cell should be uniquely realised and therefore different from every other cell, a criterion violated by the paradigm on the left. The syncretisms observed along the vertical dimension (the cells marked as “a” and “e”) obscure the differentiation of case values in the singular (nominative – accusative) and in the plural (accusative – locative). The instance of syncretism along the diagonal dimension (the cells marked as “b”) does not obscure the differentiation of any concrete feature value, but it rather enhances the ambiguity of the system by obscuring the differentiation of cells

that are at the intersection of different feature values, further reducing the canonicity of the paradigm. The only truly canonical feature value in this system is the dative, as it is defined in terms of fully autonomous exponence (has dedicated forms in both number cells).

We can conclude that this paradigm is hypocanonical, with a canonicity rating of 25%. However, in spite of the low general canonicity rating, the canonicity of the individual features is higher, with the rating for number being 100% and the rating for case 50%. Hence, adopting the canonical approach gives us a measure of categorial coverage (i.e. the degree of differentiation of the different features and their values) relative to the overall canonicity of the paradigm. The horizontal adjacency of the non-canonical values compromises a clear distinction of the accusative in this paradigm. However, while the values are non-canonical if viewed in isolation, their combination and contrast with cells elsewhere in the system justifies distinguishing the accusative as a case value. However, morphologically this accusative is a non-autonomous case value.

In the sample paradigm on the right, each intersection defines a canonical morphosyntactic feature value, as each cell contains a dedicated form. The values of number and case neatly cross-classify, conforming to Criterion 2: “Canonical features and their values are uniquely distinguished across other logically compatible features and their values” [Corbett 2012, 158]. As a result, the canonicity of the paradigm, as well as that of each feature within it, is 100%. Additionally, features should conform to Criterion 3 “Canonical features and their values are distinguished consistently across parts of speech” and Criterion 4: “Canonical features and their values are distinguished consistently across lexemes within relevant parts of speech” [Corbett 2012, 162–163].

Although in reality a completely canonical system like the one shown in Figure 1 (right) is likely to be very rare, the above discussion has illustrated how the canon represents a theoretical construct or an idealised manifestation of a linguistic phenomenon, recognising which can be highly beneficial.

3. The principles whereby Gothic realises its morphosyntactic features warrant placing Gothic among fusional languages. Thus, each of the features relevant to the adjective (gender, number, case and determination) is realised through a single form within each paradigm cell – for details of the paradigms and inflections see [Wright and Sayce 1954, 103–113, Guchman 1958, 92–101, Krause 1968, 172–186, Braune and Heidermanns 2004, 114–122]. It is noteworthy that, in this context, the traditional differentiation of the strong vs weak adjective paradigms is irrelevant, as the sole purpose of setting the two types of inflection apart is to illustrate their genetic differences. In reality, the fact that determination cross-classifies with gender, case and number means that the strong and weak sets of inflections form a single adjective paradigm [Ratkus 2009; cf. Kubrjakova 1977, 290–291, 295]. As a result, cross-multiplication of the feature values in terms of

which the Gothic adjective inflection is describable (four cases, three genders, two determination values and two numbers) generates a paradigm of 48 cells. In an ideal scenario (a canonical inflectional system), the number of cells should correspond to the number of dedicated realisations.

Although the four features of the adjective come together in a clear fusional system, their provenance is not the same. The features of gender, number and case are assigned to the adjective secondarily, as they have reference to the syntactic rule of agreement with the head noun. Hence, these are morphosyntactic features by virtue of originating in syntax and having a morphological realisation. The feature that stands out is determination, as its domain is less clear.

Whilst determination shares its morphological exponence with other features, the assignment of its values to the adjective is regulated by different principles. In particular, indefiniteness is an inherent value assigned to the adjective by default; the assignment of definiteness is realised contextually and, according to the traditional account, is likely within the realm of agreement, as the use of the weak form of the adjective is believed to be triggered by the definite determiner [cf. Kubrjakova 1977, 293]. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the systematic multirepresentation of definiteness (on the definite determiner and the weak adjective) is a question of “coinciding individual semantics of the elements bearing the feature value” [Kibort 2010, 70]. The problem of definiteness assignment is in need of a separate investigation, and will not be explored further in this paper.

3.1. The gender exponence of the Gothic adjective can be analysed along the parameters of the four criteria. The observation of Criterion 1 with reference to *a*-stems gives us the system illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Non-canonical gender exponence of *a*-stem adjectives

	indef.	def.	indef.	def.	indef.	def.
<i>Singular</i>	masc.	masc.	neut.	neut.	fem.	fem.
nom.				-ō		-ō
acc.						
gen.	-is	-ins	-is	-ins		
dat.	-amma	-in	-amma	-in		
<i>Plural</i>						
nom.						
acc.						
gen.	-aizē	-anē	-aizē	-anē		
dat.	-aim	-am	-aim	-am	-aim	

Only the relevant (non-canonical) cells have been left here. What Table 1 illustrates is that 19 out of 48 cells have non-canonical gender exponence as a result of the same morphological material being used for the exponence of different gender values, thereby obscuring the distinction. Thus, while, for instance, the definite masculine singular nominative cell (-*a*) has a dedicated form (at least in the context of the definite paradigm), the neuter and feminine cells share the same morphological material. The system of *ja*-stems is identical.

The paradigm of the *i*-stems gives slightly different results, with the addition of two more non-canonical cells: the distinction is obscured between the masculine and feminine realisation of the indefinite nominative singular cell (with both gender values represented by -*s*). Interestingly, the gender exponence pattern for the *i*-stems is structurally identical to that of *u*-stem adjectives.

Criteria 2 to 4 seem to be completely satisfied: gender on the Gothic adjective can be distinguished across number, case and determination; gender distinctions are applicable to nouns (whose gender values adjectives mirror through agreement), pronouns, participles, but not verbs. It seems, as far as can be verified, that gender distinctions apply equally to every prototypical adjective.

This presentation of gender exponence on Gothic adjectives seems to capture at least two generalisations. First, the morphosyntactic category of gender in the Gothic adjective is hypocanonical, with 42% of the paradigm having non-autonomous value exponence (i.e. this figure takes account of all paradigms). As such, it is the least canonical of the Gothic morphosyntactic features in the adjective system. Second, of the three gender values, the feminine is the most canonical, as it has the greatest number of dedicated forms. It is followed by the masculine and the neuter, which can be described in terms of virtually the same degree of canonicity, with a tiny difference between the masculine *a*- and *ja*-stems, and *i*- and *u*-stems, the canonicity profile of the former exceeding that of the latter by one dedicated form.

Table 2. Canonical number exponence

	indef.	def.	indef.	def.	indef.	def.
<i>Singular</i>	masc.	masc.	neut.	neut.	fem.	fem.
nom.	-s	-a	-∅/ata	-ō	-a	-ō
acc.	-ana	-an	-∅/ata	-ō	-a	-ōn
gen.	-is	-ins	-is	-ins	-aizōs	-ōns
dat.	-amma	-in	-amma	-in	-ai	-ōn
<i>Plural</i>						
nom.	-ai	-ans	-a	-ōna	-ōs	-ōns
acc.	-ans	-ans	-a	-ōna	-ōs	-ōns
gen.	-aizē	-anē	-aizē	-anē	-aizō	-ōnō
dat.	-aim	-am	-aim	-am	-aim	-ōm

3.2. The canonicity of the two values of number can be verified by contrasting the realisation of number across the paradigm, a test that yields some striking results. Consider the *a*-stem inflectional paradigm in Table 2.

Unlike Table 1, Table 2 focuses on canonical exponence, as otherwise all cells in this paradigm would have to be deleted. In other words, in this system each cell showcases a dedicated means of realising number. Thus, with Criteria 2 to 4 satisfied in the same way as for gender, the number exponence of the Gothic adjective is 100% transparent. The same conclusion applies to the adjective paradigms of all inflectional classes.

3.3. In contrast, the exponence of the values of case is rather less canonical, with numerous syncretisms observed throughout the paradigms. In *a*-stem adjectives, number exponence is non-canonical in 18 out of 48 paradigm cells because the morphological material in these cells is re-used. In *ja*-stems, number exponence is even less canonical, with the loss of two dedicated cells in the indefinite nominative and genitive masculine singular (both represented by *-is*).

In the *i*-stems the situation is somewhat different in the singular. The dedicated exponence of the indefinite nominative feminine singular (with *-s*) results in the enhancement of the canonicity profile of the *i*-stems by two cells, hence 16 out of 48 cells. The same is true of the *u*-stems.

Thus, as far as Criterion 1 is concerned, case is a hypocanonical morphosyntactic feature, and the second least canonical of the morphosyntactic features that apply to the Gothic adjective, with a canonicity rating of 65%. Additionally, different case values are canonical to different degrees. In particular, the genitive is fully canonical, with a 100% rating of dedicated exponence. It is followed by the dative, whose canonicity rating is 92%. The nominative and the accusative have the lowest (variable) canonicity ratings, with the accusative being even less canonical than the nominative.

3.4. Determination, represented by two values – indefinite and definite – appears to be highly canonical, with only two syncretic cells: indefinite (strong) and definite (weak) plural masculine accusative *-(j)ans*. Thus, with only 4% of the paradigm being non-canonical, determination is the second feature closest to the canonical ideal. However, this sole instance of syncretism is not the only way in which determination violates canonicity criteria.

While determination does satisfy Criterion 1 fairly well by generating 96% of dedicated forms as well as Criterion 2 by cross-classifying with other features and their values, it clearly fails to satisfy Criterion 3. In particular, in Gothic it is exclusive to adjectives and (past) participles, but is inapplicable to nouns. Additionally, Criterion 4 is violated: while determination clearly applies to the bulk of Gothic adjectives (indefinite *blinds* ‘blind’ – definite *blinda*), some are confined to either the indefinite (*midjis** ‘middle’) or the definite value (*taihswa** ‘right (hand)'), giving an asymmetrical system.

4. Assuming a canonical ideal has enabled us to measure across various dimensions. It has been shown that, despite the fact that the overall canonicity profile of the Gothic adjective, at 14%, is relatively low, the degree of canonicity in some departments of the adjective system is very high. Table 3 summarises the results.

Table 3. Canonicity ratings across the Gothic adjective paradigm

overall canonicity 14%	number 100%	singular 100 %
		plural 100%
	determination 96%	indefinite 96%
		definite 96%
	case 65%	nominative 39%
		accusative 31%
		genitive 100%
		dative 92%
	gender 58%	masculine 46%
		neuter 44%
feminine 83%		

It is a striking fact that the category of number is 100% canonical, and determination, at 96%, is very close to the canon. By contrast, case is 65% canonical and gender only 58% canonical. Thus, in terms of the degree of transparency with which it realises its values, number is the closest feature to the canonical ideal there is [cf. Corbett 2013, 57], followed by determination. The latter, even though its rating of autonomous exponence is very high (i.e. Criterion 1 is only insignificantly violated), seems to be the least canonical morphosyntactic feature in principle, as it violates Criteria 3 and 4 at the same time.

These figures are interesting in themselves inasmuch as they indicate the varying degrees to which the exponence of certain morphosyntactic features and their values has been eroded by syncretism. But they also help capture additional useful cross-linguistic and historical generalisations. Consider the figures for five more languages, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse and modern Lithuanian, all of which have an equivalent set of features in their adjective system. The figures given for Old English, Old High German and Old Saxon are based on *a*-stem and *ō*-stem paradigms, as given respectively in [Wright 1925, 217, 226], [Braune 1987, 217, 222], and [Cathey 2000, 38–40] and [Holthausen 1921, 127, 130]. It is expected that taking other stem-types into account might somewhat alter the figures, albeit to a very insignificant degree. The figures for Old Norse are based on the paradigms given in Steblin-Kamenskij [1955, 72, 74] and Barnes [2008, 80–81]. For Lithuanian, the figures

are based on the most productive (*i*)*o*- and (*i*)*a*-stems – for details of the paradigms see [Ambrazas 2006, 147–148, 156–158]. Given the general conservatism of Lithuanian, taking the data of other declensions into account is likely to have only an insignificant impact on the overall figures.

Table 4. Canonicity ratings of adjective features in Gothic, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse and Lithuanian

	GOTHIC	OE	OHG	OS	ON	LITHUANIAN
overall canonicity	14%	2%	8%	8%	13%	83%
number	100%	75%	92%	75%	88%	100%
determination	96%	75%	100%	88%	88%	100%
case	65%	48%	52%	52%	48%	96%
gender	58%	27%	54%	31%	42%	88%

Table 4 juxtaposes the canonicity profiles of the adjective inflection across five Germanic languages in comparison with Lithuanian, a non-Germanic Indo-European (Baltic) language which has a robust system of inflections and the feature of determination in the adjective system. The premise here is that the different time of attestation of several languages within the same family can be seen to represent different stages in the development of Germanic, which furnishes a diachronic dimension to typological comparison. The genetic (non-)relatedness of the Baltic and Germanic dual adjective inflection systems (and especially the definite adjective inflection) is immaterial. What matters at this point is that both older Germanic and Lithuanian have two determination values expressed inflectionally on the adjective, whatever the origin of the inflection.

Before turning to the explanatory value of these numbers, one problematic aspect of computing paradigm canonicity must be addressed. In particular, the figures reported in Table 4 may create the misleading impression that the inflectional systems of older Germanic were neatly organised and variation-free. Nothing could be further from the truth: the cell-internal inflectional variation observed in Old English, and especially Old High German and Old Saxon, makes the quantification of paradigm canonicity rather tricky. Because inflectional variation can be caused by several factors, taking each of these factors into account should increase the accuracy of judgment.

For instance, variation can be a question of inflectional allomorphy regulated by stylistic and contextual factors, as in the case with the co-variance of *-ata* and \emptyset in the Gothic neuter singular nominative and accusative cells – for details, see [Ratkus 2015]. In cases like this one, it makes sense to compute an

average figure by comparing each of the variant forms with inflections in the other cells in order to avoid a one-sided presentation that would only account for one of the variants.

Another source of inflectional variation is dialect usages. These are relatively easy to take account of, as it is possible to quantify separate canonicity ratings for the different dialect variants of the paradigm. The same applies to any systematic instances of variation, including any demonstrable co-variance of conservative and newer forms or the idiolects of individual speakers. But what about unsystematic instances of variation where a single speaker does not “respect” a given paradigm cell enough and offers several phonetic realisations of the same grammatical form? It seems that the only solution to this is either to compute average figures or ranges by discounting any variation and acknowledging only the “default” forms (particularly where a given variant is found to dominate), and then comparing the results with those for the same paradigms including every possible variant. The latter is the tactic applied in computing the results reported in Table 4, which presents the maximum ratings for each language. It must be pointed out that taking all paradigm-internal variation into account not only confirms the general tendencies emerging from the table, but can also help clarify some ambiguous results. Consider Table 5 for refined figures that account for variation in the paradigms.

Table 5. Canonicity ratings of adjective features (including form variation)

	GOTHIC	OE	OHG	OS	ON	LITHU- ANIAN
overall canonicity	14%	2%	8%	8%	13%	83%
number	100%	75%	92%	75%	88%	100%
determination	96%	75%	100%	88%	88%	100%
case	65%	48%	52%	52%	48%	96%
gender	58%	27%	54%	31%	42%	88%

Four interesting generalisations emerge from this comparison: (i) there is a high overall degree of symmetry between the canonicity profiles defining the six languages; (ii) in the Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse as well as in the Lithuanian data, the features of determination and number are confirmed as being closest to the canon, followed by case and gender²; even though

² The only exception is gender being more canonical than case in Old High German (as shown in Table 4), which perhaps should not be overestimated, as the difference of 2% is relatively insignificant. As it emerges from Table 5, accounting for inflectional variation rectifies this imbalance.

the figures for Lithuanian are generally very high, taken at face value they seem to corroborate the tendencies observed in Germanic; (iii) even where there is a dramatic drop in the overall degree of canonicity – for example 8% in Old High German or 2% in Old English and Old Saxon (thereby making the inflectional systems of Old English and Old Saxon highly hypocanonical in general terms) – there is a strong tendency in these languages for a high level of autonomous number and determination exponence to be preserved; (iv) the evidence for Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon and Old Norse indicates that – whereas the realisation of number and determination can have an equally high degree of transparency (as in Old Norse) – determination tends to be more canonical than number, with the figures for Old English, Old High German and Old Saxon offset only by the minor discrepancy in Gothic.

The above results provide a compelling answer to Ringe's question [Ringe 2006, 170] regarding the definiteness value of the *n*-stem inflection (see section 1 above). The high degree of canonicity that defines the inflectional exponence of determination on the Gothic adjective strongly suggests that the opposition of the strong and weak inflections represents a robust system that was highly relevant from the point of view of a native speaker of Gothic. In other words, if we admit that Gothic (and every other older Germanic language) had morphologically realised gender and case distinctions irrespective of the relatively low canonicity of these features, there can be no doubt about the robustness of the *n*-stem suffix as a definite marker. Whether or not the use of the weak form of the adjective was triggered by a definite determiner, the presence or absence of the determiner is unrelated to the weak inflection as a carrier of definiteness.

5. In lieu of a conclusion, it is worthwhile exploring some possible implications of the above discussion and suggesting some directions for further research. Although paradigm canonicity is, in effect, no different from oppositions in, for instance, vowel systems, the advantage of exploring the oppositions of features and their values in canonical terms helps capture some interesting generalisations that might otherwise have escaped notice. The fact that the figures reported above highlight a systematic picture of tendencies for each older Germanic language (as well as Lithuanian) raises the question of whether the systematic distribution of figures in synchronic grammar has synchronic causes. Whereas in order to address this question a larger-scale study is required that would examine the canonicity of nominal categories across more languages, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that the explanation may lie in the pragmatic relevance of feature assignment. For instance, gender, which is inherent to nouns and is assigned to adjectives through agreement, is the least canonical feature. Case, which is also assigned to adjectives through agreement, is assigned to nouns in accordance with the syntactic role in which the noun happens to occur. Thus, although the assignment of case is not entirely a matter of the speaker's choice,

it is less static than the assignment of gender and, as a result, case has a higher canonicity rating. The feature of number, similar to gender and case, is assigned to adjectives through agreement with the noun. However, number assignment to nouns (or at least the nouns that can be declined for number) is a matter of the speaker's choice, dictated by the speaker's perception of the world and regulated by reference constraints. Hence, number is even more canonical than gender and case. Ultimately, the feature of determination, realised contextually, is entirely a matter of the speaker's subjective perception of the communicative situation. As a result, it is synchronically relevant and has the highest canonicity rating.

If these assumptions are correct, it might be tentatively suggested that the tendencies characterising the morphological (adjective) paradigms in older Germanic have some diachronic implications. Thus, throughout the development of older Germanic, there seems to have been a need to maintain the exponence of determination and number while sacrificing the morphological differentiation of other features: the figures indicate that number and determination are the more respected categories, which are better able to withstand the pressure of erosion over time [cf. Kubrjakova 1977, 297].

Alternatively, it might be speculated that the contrast between the canonicity of gender and determination reflects the age of these categories, with gender reaching all the way back to Indo-European [see Miller 2010, 122–136, with further references] and determination (realised on the adjective) being a Germanic innovation. However, the situation is complicated along several dimensions. First, it may be misleading to concentrate on the overall low canonicity of gender, as the feminine in Gothic appears to be rather more salient than the masculine or the neuter. This is unsurprising because the feminine was still spreading (increasing its domain) in all of the early (extra-Anatolian) Indo-European languages. Second, number (singular – plural – collective) goes back to Proto-Indo-European similar to the common gender – neuter contrast. The relative age of the two categories cannot be determined because it is impossible to reconstruct a time when one existed without the other. Third, determination on the adjective was not exclusively a Germanic innovation, but was at the very least an areal feature shared with Baltic and Slavic. In Germanic, determination is maintained most saliently in German – but cf. Faarlund [2009] on definiteness marking in Scandinavian. In English, number eventually takes the upper hand, and determination as a morphological category succumbs to the developing system of the article as the principle way of realising determination distinctions – for a detailed treatment of adjective inflectional morphology in the history of English, see Dobroneckaja [1978].

The high degree of autonomous exponence in the category of determination would also seem to suggest that the “obligatory” determiner accompanying the weak adjective was probably nothing more than a mechanical presence that

played some functional (rather than semantic) role, as there was no need for it to double-mark the noun phrase for definiteness – a role that the weak adjective was capable of expressing on its own. This, in conjunction with the other specificities that define the use and distribution of strong vs weak adjective forms, may not only help clarify the issue of definiteness assignment, but may also present in itself a clue to the historical development of the dual adjective inflection in Germanic.

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