

Points of Contact between fem. \bar{o} - and n -stems in Old Germanic (Abstract)

Since the suffix of the IE¹ \bar{a} -stems (originally $*-eh_2-$) became $*-\bar{o}$ - in Germanic by regular sound law, and since the fem. n -stems of the type ON *tunga* ‘tongue’ are usually reconstructed with a suffix $*-\bar{o}n-$ throughout their paradigm and therefore also contained $*-\bar{o}$ -, the inflection of these two declension patterns came to look quite similar in Germanic. This is supposedly the reason why many fem. nouns in Germanic seem to fluctuate between these two classes. Many of them show evidence for an inflection as \bar{o} - as well as n -stems across the Old Germanic languages, so that it is quite hard to establish their original stem formation. This is illustrated e.g. by the fact that the most recent substantial treatment of the Germanic lexicon, ORELS *Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (OREL 2003), contains more than 100² lemmata which are ambiguous in this respect.

An example of this type is the word PGmc $*muld\bar{o}(n)$ f. ‘dust’, which is reconstructed from Goth *mulda*, ON *mold*, OFr *molde*, OHG *molta*, and OE *molde*. In this case, it is mostly believed that the word is an \bar{o} -stem originally, because Gothic as the oldest language has an \bar{o} -stem, and that the n -stems like OE *molde* are of a later date (cf. e.g. CASARETTO 2004:450). Other cases, however, are harder to decide, especially if the word is not attested in Gothic, as is the case with ON *flaska* ‘small bottle’, ON *kúla* ‘ball’, ON *brufa* ‘crust’, or ON *bóla* ‘blister’, which shows traces of a formation with $*-j-$ (cf. OHG *bullā*, OE *býle*), and their respective cognates. In fact, many of the relevant words seem to be confined to North and West Germanic, which indicates that the con-

tacts between these two inflectional classes might be specific to these branches of Gmc.

In all of these cases, three possible explanations for the attested material should be considered: (1) We are dealing with separate lemmata that existed in parallel on the Proto-Germanic level, (2) we are dealing with derivations on the level of the individual languages which are therefore not of Proto-Germanic age, (3) one of the two stem formations is older and the noun has subsequently been transferred to (i.e. morphologically remodelled after) the other class in some of the Gmc languages.

Which one of these explanations applies in a given case is difficult to determine. However, it is to be hoped that a comparative analysis of the attested forms in the Old Germanic languages might help to better understand the pre-history of these words. In this paper, I intend to make a step in that direction by discussing a number of the fem. nouns in question, and by analyzing their inflection and stem formation, I hope to shed some light on the points of contact between the declension patterns of fem. \bar{o} - and n -stems.

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¹ Explanation of Abbreviations: IE *Indo-European*, ON *Old Norse*, Gmc *Germanic*, PGmc *Proto-Germanic*, OHG *Old High German*, MHG *Middle High German*, OFris *Old Frisian*, OE *Old English*, OS *Old Saxon*, Goth *Gothic*.

² This includes cases of ambiguity between $*-j\bar{o}$ - and $*-j\bar{o}n$ -stems. In addition, this number includes cases which are ambiguous not because the evidence points two ways, but because we have too few attested forms to assign the word to one of the two classes.